

*frantic*assembly



A Guide to Frantic Assembly
for students (aged 14+), teachers & arts educationalists

By Frantic Assembly



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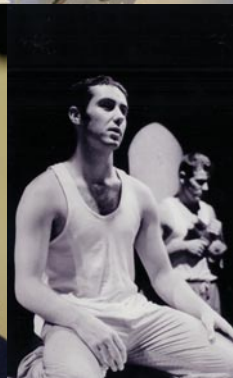
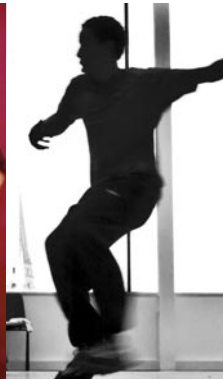
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Introduction

This resource pack aims to give you access to some of the things you might want to know about our company. Writing it has brought back memories of broken down vans, bewildered audiences, getting very drunk and very proud at our first award, of smoke machines setting off fire alarms in a school in Truro and the whole audience having to stand with us, in costume, in a rainy car park, and probably the worst review ever written for a first night in the history of theatre (it was David Adams writing in the Western Mail about our show *Flesh*. Conveniently I can't find it on the web but no doubt it is out there!). It also brought back the excitement of realising that people were getting what we were trying to do and that it meant something to them, whether that was the energy of the shows, the intensity of the workshops, or the company's ethos of accessibility.



Artistic Directors, Scott Graham (right) and Steven Hoggett (left)

We have been doing this for 15 years now and thought the timing was right to create this pack. *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre* is out there now (in all good bookstores, as they say) and it seemed to tell us that we had reached a certain level of credibility. It also made us realise that 15 years is a long time and we are no longer the new kids on the block, or the up and coming hot things. In lots of ways we can be seen as an 'establishment' and those coming to the company for the first time would have very valid questions... Who are these people? Why do they make this kind of work? How did they start? What is their average height?

OK, maybe not the last one but you do get that one for free.

We hope this pack is useful, illuminating, interesting and relevant. You know where to find us if it isn't.

Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett, co-Artistic Directors

Background to Frantic Assembly

I want to start by writing about the company's development in the way it recruits performers; how this has been shaped by the work and vice versa. It strikes me that there are two useful sections to break this into. They are not crystal clear or completely distinct but the definitions may serve to articulate how the development of the company has been felt from the inside. This will become clearer when you know the section headings...

The 'get in the back of the van!' years

We formed our company with a desire to do something different, but being inspired by and in awe of Volcano Theatre Company and DV8 films meant that our first dabblings were clichéd and derivative. We needed help. We were desperate to channel our raw energy and emulate the visceral quality of both companies but our boundless enthusiasm did not disguise the fact that we had very little clue about taking our work to the next, professional level.

Our saving grace was recognising this at an early stage. Everything from this point was approached with a level head, acknowledging that we were starting from the bottom of the pile. To get us started we attended business courses and enrolled on the government's Enterprise Allowance Scheme (which is no longer in existence). In 1994 we applied to the scheme after having spent a few months claiming dole to prove we were committing all our time to setting up a new business. In return, the DSS stopped hassling us about finding jobs and continued to support us in the first year while our fledgling company tried to take off. Frantic Theatre Company¹ was born and registered as a limited company in Swansea, Wales (where we had all met at university). At this time our company had three founding directors² and the Government paid each of us £30 a week (£10 less than the dole we had been receiving). On top of this, our company paid us an extra £10 a week.

Every theatre company needs a product and we were no different. We already had an interest in devising our own work but it was clear that we needed something extra if we were to entice venues throughout Wales and beyond to invest in an unheard of company. It was the pragmatic advice of others (probably Volcano Theatre Company) that led us to conclude that our next play needed to define

¹ The name Frantic Theatre Company became Frantic Assembly partly because we wanted it to, partly because a nasty solicitor for another Frantic Theatre Company was threatening us.

² Frantic Theatre Company was founded by Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Vicki Middleton (nee Coles). Scott and Steven still work for the company today. Vicki now lives in Australia and is a successful freelance producer.

our style and demonstrate our unique selling point. We had to find something that the venues could hook into and that audiences would feel safe spending their money on. Previously, as students, we had recognised that no one would come to watch Swansea University Drama Society perform at the Edinburgh Fringe and that a brand name like 'Frantic' might hide the fact that we were all amateurs. This time, choosing a highly acclaimed text like *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne might deflect from the fact that we were a feisty little physical theatre company.

It was a risk. It led to us performing in very conservative theatres, presenting a completely unauthorised and radical reworking of a very well known play³. We ran the risk of alienating our audience and the theatres, but the exposure was crucial. It was the foot in the door.



Frantic's first production, *Look Back in Anger*, 1994

The choice of play was pragmatic but not wholly cynical. We believed in *Look Back in Anger* and still do. It is an important play that has been done a disservice by time and the theatre establishment. It is full of post war angst of the educated working class; sold the dream of a brave new world only to find it already carved up by the ruling classes. As working class kids ourselves, just out of the culture shock of university, the play spoke to us in ways we had never expected. We found the fire in its belly and wanted to put that back on the stage. While we took liberties with its text and structure we believed we were staying true to the heart of a play that had shaken society when it was first performed, yet barely raises an eyebrow now. Our experience told us that contemporary society was not all that different from the one in this story.

Before we could make our 'product', we needed performers. We had previously worked with Korina Biggs at university and she shared our enthusiasm for physical theatre. She too had no theatre experience other than the drama society we had all met through. She was a highly intelligent social anthropology student who, after graduating, generously joined Frantic Theatre Company. I say generously because the company could only cover the directors' wages. Her time was given voluntarily at first in this crucial set up period. Despite this, she was utterly committed to the success of the productions and the company. We recruited another performer, Claire Evetts, to make up the four we would use for *Look Back in Anger*.

Crucially, one thing we have always been able to do is talk a good game and even at the start we were able to entice a choreographer of high standing to work with us. This would be a consistent pattern. We could somehow convince these talented practitioners that our capacity to fall over and bounce back up again, our passion and vision was potential enough. We were always interesting for them, somehow. Maybe as a challenge.

Juan M. Carrusoso (Teatro Atalaya of Seville) came on board as choreographer/director for *Look Back in Anger*. Soon after, Steve Kirkham (The Featherstonehaughs, DV8) joined us to choreograph *Klub*, a devised piece that would accompany *Look Back in Anger* in Edinburgh. Possibly the most influential of all our collaborators at this point was Spencer Hazel. A jack of all trades, Spencer designed lights and performed in *Klub*. It was Spencer who had the guts to attack and adapt *Look Back in Anger* in such a way. He was also the driving force behind the new performance style developing in *Klub*. As the writer, Spencer encouraged us to divulge our stories and histories while he pilfered, reattributed and fantasised the creation of our performance personas. He was very much into theatre as a live event, a communion, as something dangerous and exciting. As a writer he was fascinatingly anti-script. It was all about the performance and the relationship between performer and audience. This was dynamite for us and it matched our committed, honest and ultimately limited performance abilities to a tee.

Here was our manifesto; the direct address, here and now, warts and all style. It felt good. People took notice. This style was further exploited in the next two shows, *Flesh* and *Zero*, which formed the generation trilogy (toured in 1998). *Zero*, the final instalment, was written and devised by the company when relationships with Spencer broke down. This process was a necessity as we were without a writer in the middle of rehearsals.

Finances had improved over this time and performers were now being auditioned and paid, but there were still many familiar faces. This probably gave the impression that we were some kind of travelling troupe; a family living out of a transit van, performing, packing up and shipping out to the next venue. It was not far from the truth. We were all over-worked and underpaid, setting up the shows technically

³ We would not advise new companies to take the risks we took with the John Osborne estate. We arrogantly abused the text, no matter how noble we thought our intentions were. This put us in a legal position where we were compromising the existence of our company before it had even really got off the ground. As a strategy for a new company it was reckless and absurd (and rather brilliant). Don't do it, kids!

ourselves, shutting down our office to operate on tour and spending many, many hours amongst the set in the back of the van as it lumbered down indistinguishable motorways in the small hours.

Such proximity forms bonds but it has a shelf life. It was always our ambition to get to the level where we could pay people properly for the job they had been hired for, but when we got to this level we felt the sense of 'troupe' dissipate. It was no bad thing. It had run its course and any misty eyed desire to romanticise those days in the back of the van soon dissolved too. Looking back, this era was clearly a necessary stage in the company's development and has shaped our informal and accessible relationships with performers and the public.

Paying proper wages meant that we could look further afield for performers. At the time we thought that there must be a world full of performers trained in the skills we needed (remember that we were not trained and possessed insecurities about our abilities). Yet it was when we cast the net wider that we realised finding the right performers is a constantly troublesome business.

We would advertise in a magazine called PCR (Production and Casting Report) and, if we could afford it, *The Stage*. We were stunned by the response. The company was getting known by this time but we never expected so many hopefuls to apply. Unfortunately, we began to discover that the volume of applicants was not necessarily a sign of our status within the theatre world. It was more an indication of how desperate some people are to be performers. Even at CV stage some applications were appalling. For a production where we explicitly asked for two FEMALE physical performers we even had two men apply! There were around 1,000 applicants for that particular job and only one of them was impressive. We ended up auditioning and employing two people we already knew!



Georgina Lamb in rehearsals for *Stockholm*

All of this meant that we had to change the way we recruited performers. More and more it came about through recommendations and through developing relationships with agents so that they would understand the nature of our work and not send us people who were unsuitable. This helped enormously.

As two people who had never done an audition in our lives we were completely averse to putting hopefuls through what we understood to be a terrible process. We wanted to see people in a workshop situation, to spend time with them in the hope that we might see something we would have missed in a standard audition and hopefully the auditionees would get something out of it too. This approach meant that auditions were very time consuming and had a lot of energy invested into them. The results were not always successful but it is still a practice that we try to hold onto today where possible.

As the search for performers went on we realised how lucky we had been in meeting some people so early in their careers, namely Georgina Lamb and Cait Davis. They have appeared in many Frantic Assembly shows and are recognisable Frantic performers (in a way this helps prolong the impression of Frantic Assembly as a performance troupe). When you have access to such performers and you have become aware through searching just how rare their talents are you tend to hold onto them. We have been fortunate to be able to cast them in recent productions⁴, but we always set ourselves the ongoing task of finding new performers for projects if we feel that these two are not perfect for the roles. Without design these actresses have typified the Frantic Assembly physicality. They are brave, strong, and short! We have not set out to find performers that make two short men look taller on stage. Honest!

Having formed the company proper in 1994 the two artistic directors were still touring, performing, and putting up and striking the set in 2001. Constant touring had taken its toll and there was a growing realisation that performing was not really why we had been inspired to start the company. We wanted to make theatre, but while there was no one to facilitate this it made absolute sense that we were performing the work. There were no regrets but there was now a real desire to step out of that role and out of the rigours of touring, and find a way for the company to nurture us as theatre directors and choreographers.

This was not an easy step as our involvement as performers in any project meant, financially speaking, that we had two 'free' performers since our fees were covered in core costs. This was a luxury that the company had not only got used to, but had completely relied on for its survival. And now we wanted to change all that...

⁴ Cait Davies performed in 'pool (no water)' in 2006 and Georgina Lamb played Kali in 'Stockholm' in 2007.

The great joy of being on the outside as a director as opposed to being a performer directing from the inside is that you are no longer restricted by your own limitations. You have more freedom to let your imagination run and when you are working with the right people you can achieve things that are genuinely surprising for you.

This is where we have got to. It was not a simple jump from deciding not to perform and it is still a massive learning curve, but one that we are very happy to be on. We are still faced with the familiar dilemmas of casting but the work has changed over the years and that has brought new demands and frustrations.

So what to call this section?...

The 'meet you in the bar' years

There was a subtle problem with having both of our artistic directors putting up and taking down the sets for performances. This became clear when talking to the British Council's Head of Drama, Sally Cowling. She asked us what cultural links we had made on our many visits abroad with our early shows. After a bit of thought we answered 'none'. She thought this was unfeasible, but we stressed that we had found it impossible to make those high level connections when we had spent nearly all of



Production shot from *Tiny Dynamite*

our time abroad putting the set up, performing, leading workshops and taking the set back down. We felt there may even have been a reluctance to take us seriously, as we could mostly be seen during production days with our legs sticking out from under the set or wearing costumes as the show was teched around us. Any resident artistic directors at these venues would have seen us as two technicians or two actors. They would not have seen us as Frantic Assembly's artistic directors and, with respect, would not have considered us to be on their level. Clearly, we could not promote ourselves as directors where we were being seen first and foremost as actors or technicians.

Opting out of the productions was the first obvious step to addressing this. There was a slight issue in that for many people the look of a Frantic Assembly show was the sight of us two on stage, which may have been one of the

reasons why this break from the stage was actually a gradual one. However, taking this step allowed us to be advocates for the company, talking to the right people in the bar before and after the performance and hopefully letting the work on stage speak for itself.

During this period we developed a close link with Paines Plough, a new writing theatre company. We created two shows together, *Tiny Dynamite* and *On Blindness*, and this introduced us to a completely different type of performer. These performers were very much text first, as you would expect, and subsequently both shows were very text led.



Steven in *On Blindness*

The more we worked with Paines Plough the higher our aspirations became to find actors who could handle difficult text. The problem was that we did not put enough emphasis on the physicality during our search for performers and any subsequent movement vocabulary was affected as a result. This was not easy to resolve. In the past we felt that we had placed brilliant movers in a position where they were obviously struggling with text. We had been in a situation where we had our physical vocabulary outweighing any textual dexterity and now while courting Paines Plough we had fallen foul of exactly the opposite.

We learned so much from those years working closely with Vicky Featherstone at Paines Plough. The biggest gifts she gave us were confidence, credibility and ultimately the ability to say 'we are not Paines Plough, we are Frantic Assembly.' This meant that we had to set our own trajectory and remind

ourselves about what turns us on, theatrically. It also meant that we were really switched on to the constant actor vs. dancer dilemma.

We have said often enough that we will sometimes look for actors who can move and sometimes dancers who can act. The result of that search has and always will shape the show. Recently we realised that despite wanting it all, we have to accept the demands of the text when casting. As much as possible the text itself will shape or dictate the skills required of the performers.

While developing *pool (no water)* with Mark Ravenhill we all felt that we were aiming for a completely visceral production. However, when the script started to materialise it became clear that this was not

the kind of text that could be carried off successfully without strong acting technique. Was this our first compromise? I don't think so. It simply dictated the balance of skills we were looking for. It meant that firstly we were looking for actors and secondly we were looking for actors who could move really well. That is not to say that we had compromised our ambitions for the physicality completely. Many exciting performers did not make it through the casting stage as we had again insisted on a movement based session with them. Those that had impressed us in a reading were invited back to a physical workshop where we really saw what they were capable of. We had worked closely with a casting director on this project and sometimes it felt that instead of her making it easier for us we were merely sharing the pain with her.

Working with a casting director is now crucial to our casting process but at the time it showed us that despite knowing hundreds of performers inside and out in terms of acting ability, they do not necessarily know what we need to know about their potential as physical performers. But the more a casting director gets to know our demands (as we get to know them too) then the better chance we have of working really well together in the future.

People ask us all the time 'how do you cast for your productions?' It is still a mixture of recommendations, people we have seen perform and auditionees supplied by casting directors that are then sifted through by us⁵. Unfortunately, it is impossible to hold open auditions. We would be deluged with CV's and be obliged to read them all. The man hours in this task alone would kill us, never mind the expense of all the auditions and recalls.

As always there are exceptions to this process. *Dirty Wonderland* was all about getting together the right balance of people, but we did not hold auditions. The cast was filled with dancers who we knew would be amazing physically and actors that we were sure would add a gravitas and credibility to the words. With writer Michael Wynne we used their talents and limitations to shape the production and the result was arguably the most successful to date.

Artistic Process

As a company with two artistic directors I think that our artistic process fascinates people. 'What is it like with two directors? Do you agree on everything? Do you argue? Who does what?'

These questions are quite simple to answer - inspiring, no, hardly ever, depends.

But that does not really give an insight into the process or the artistic relationship and before I attempt to throw some light on it please remember that it is often very difficult to get a perspective on something when you are in the middle of it. It often takes the observations of others to help us get a handle on what we do. Having said that, Mark Ravenhill commented on and defined our working relationship in an article for The Guardian www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/sep/20/theatre1. On

working with us, writer Bryony Lavery said that she thought it was fascinating how we worked and that, in her eyes, Mark Ravenhill had got it completely wrong. So where does that leave us?

When we started this company I think we both needed each other for validation as much as inspiration. As two English Literature graduates, from a university without a drama department we had no right to be setting out on this theatrical ambition. But together we had support, encouragement and enthusiasm. Without that little team I very much doubt that we would be working in theatre separately today.

The early days had us looking for an artistic process, much defined by the demands of the people we worked with rather than by us. We were feeling our

way but realised quickly that our lack of experience and theatre training was actually liberating. We knew nothing of the important practitioners, other than Volcano, DV8 and a few others. Knowing nothing of, for example, Artaud meant that we were not beholden to a set of values or a defined process. We were absolutely free to try things out without dismissing a previous manifesto. There were no arguments about the directions of the company because they veered away from a classical line or suddenly contradicted themselves. It was all steered by gut instinct.

⁵ Incidentally, a good way to be seen by us is to attend one of our public workshops. This route has led to direct or indirect employment with us for at least four performers!



Liam Steel in Frantic's site-specific show *Dirty Wonderland*



Scott and Steven in rehearsal for *Stockholm*

...And it still is. It may seem more clearly defined but ultimately it is still instinctive. This is one of the reasons why we feel slightly uncomfortable committing our 'artistic process' to print. We reserve the right to completely change our minds!

But here goes...

One of the most important and defining features of our artistic process is that the initial ideas come from us. Even if we work with a writer, that writer is often engaged long after the genesis of the idea and is invited to embrace and expand that idea. This is not to belittle their input, but merely to clarify that we are not able to commission and develop writers in the same way as, for example, Paines Plough. Clearly we are not a writer's company, but I like to think that we are a company that a writer can get a lot from.

This process was a little different when working with Mark Ravenhill on *pool (no water)*. We all went into the initial development sessions with NO ideas and worked from there. This was an intentional development. Also with Brendan Cowell's *Rabbit* we took a completed play and then reworked it with him. This was also a deliberate tactic to refresh our artistic processes.

Ideas can take years to reach the stage. That does not mean that they spend years in development but an idea might sit on the back burner waiting for the right artistic or social climate before we feel it is the time to turn them into a production. This is particularly true of *Hymns* where we felt that the world was not ready to listen to a play about how men find it difficult to talk about their feelings - not just that they don't talk about how they feel, but specifically that the world is not set up to listen to them. Ironically it took the death of several friends and a high profile documentary on the rates of suicide in young males to convince us that things were changing and the time was right to make the show. We needed it to be listened to and not be dismissed.

Stockholm, performed in 2007, was inspired by an argument witnessed in 1999. It took us that long to get our heads around it and feel that it was applicable to create the show. We had come very close to producing this show before, but there was a very similar sounding show already in existence so we shelved the idea. It is another example of the artistic process or output being shaped by pragmatism.

More recently another director suggested that we should direct *Othello*. It was only when we were looking for ways to exploit the potential of the book *Dark Heart* by Nick Davies that the idea of adapting our own version of *Othello* made sense.

Sometimes ideas come from conversations we have. *Zero* was inspired by a chat about pre-millennium tension while sat in the back of a minibus as we toured *Klub* around Ecuador. Sometimes it is the desire to get into a room with certain practitioners to see what happens. This was the case with *Heavenly* when we worked with Liam Steel. Generally we want to work with highly creative practitioners in a collaborative process. This means we want people for the skills they offer but also want them to be inspired by and comment on other areas of creativity. We want lighting designers to engage with the choreography, designers to engage with the music and all of this to happen as early as possible.

Music is a massive inspiration to us. We have it in our heads all the time and we use it in rehearsals at every stage. We cannot understand the type of rehearsal where the music only arrives in the tech week. It is integral to how we understand and communicate our theatre. It is a very present collaborator throughout the rehearsal process. This probably culminated in our production of *Peepshow*, which was inspired by the music video as a genre but also tried to sustain the same aesthetic. It was essentially a modern musical told through MTV sensibilities.

Our rehearsal process, like our personnel, is often short and flexible. We are learning all the time. We enjoy the intensity of the five/six week rehearsals and freely admit to being unable to sustain the interest or concentration levels if our rehearsals stretched on for much longer. We do not envy the months or even years taken for some productions abroad. It sounds like hell if not weeks of navel gazing and self-justification.

Financial constrictions often mean that the rehearsals are cut to five weeks, but this is the absolute minimum we demand. We do not think it is possible for us to integrate the level of text, movement and production values we aim for in less than five weeks. Future productions may also require more time. *The Keys*, a non-verbal but highly choreographed dance theatre piece (currently not scheduled for production) may take longer because of the amount of physicality involved. *Little Dogs* for National Theatre Wales in 2012 will require merely four intensive weeks, as we want a more rough and ready, guerilla approach.



Production shot from *Hymns* used as the poster image for the remake in 2005



The early troupe, Korina, Steven, Cait, Scott, Georgina (left to right) in *Zero*

There is a culture in 'straight' theatre of four week rehearsal periods and our six weeks can seem a luxury. Obviously the additional demands of choreography means our rehearsals take much longer. On the other hand, many dance companies rehearse for up to eight weeks, which we would consider too long for a Frantic production. Our attention spans are probably too fragile to accommodate that luxury.

During rehearsals we place a lot of emphasis on the text. We insist on a solid working draft before we go into rehearsals and often spend the majority of the first week pouring over its possibilities. Many of the physical ideas come from this. Sometimes it is what the script says and sometimes it is what it does not say that inspires the use of a physical language. Sometimes there are things we want to try that are outside the text and hopefully complement it. Often it takes a while to get a feel for the rhythms of the text. A good understanding of this dictates when and where and what kind of physicality is required.

Over the years we have developed our particular strengths in the rehearsal room but that does not mean we have fixed artistic roles within the company. It is much more fluid than that. And of course we do not always agree or think the same thing, even if at times it may seem like that. If we always agreed then it would be pointless having two directors. As it is we can inspire, surprise and challenge as well as support each other.

Education

There are very good reasons why we are so dedicated to our education work.

It currently falls into two areas: **Learn** which covers all aspects of our interaction with schools, colleges and academic establishment and **Train** which the company provides for members of the public and professionals seeking development.

This work is rooted in the way the company was formed. After unexpected and almost accidental exposure to physical theatre as university students we were suddenly completely turned on by this world. After watching a physical theatre production of *Savages* by Christopher Hampton we set out to attend as many workshops as we could and immediately brought these skills back to our drama society hoping to steer it away from flat pack presentations of Chekhov, Ibsen and Ayckbourn.

When we formed the company proper we realised that any skills we picked up could be exploited to help keep the company afloat. As we were getting 'in kind' support from the local council it also meant that we would return favours in the shape of workshops for incredulous and riotous kids on Saturday afternoons.

Undaunted, we set out to link our workshops to the touring work.

It seemed that the more we found a voice on stage the more we wanted to share our creative processes and demonstrate the accessibility of this way of working. As untrained practitioners on the verge of becoming recognised professional practitioners we felt we had a passion and a duty to let people know there were ways of getting their work out there, that the world is full of inspiration and that YOU can do it.

It was very idealistic stuff but central to the creative ethos of the company. We have stated elsewhere that we have not sought to disparage the well trodden route into legitimate theatre but we have also taken time to stress that our lack of training was a liberating factor in our development.

In early tours it was the financial input from the workshop programme that held the company together. During desperate times we spent our evenings playing to small audiences at the Croydon Warehouse and filled our days leading workshops at schools in the area. These schools began to bring parties of raucous and welcome young audiences to see us perform.

It was at the Croydon Warehouse that we first made links with Tom Morris (now at the Bristol Old Vic, formerly at NT and back then running Battersea Arts Centre) and the British Council (another source of vital income as we would go on to tour our shows across the world).

When we returned to London (this time at BAC) we increased the workshop load and set out to bring our schools audience with us from Croydon. This groundwork paid off handsomely. As we arrived at the venue to begin the get in we were told that we had just sold out our complete four week run and most of this was school groups.

The word of mouth about the workshops was good. I firmly believe it was our education work that got



Photo taken at a Frantic Assembly public workshop in 2006

our foot in the door in London and started a buzz about the company in the area. Obviously, it could be pointed out that it was the work previously presented in Croydon, but I believe the two worked together.

It is the same today. Our Learn and Train programme is out there creating and developing audiences rather than just serving existing audiences. We are also very proud of this work and the impact it has on its participants and we recognise that this kind of interaction can lead the way in promoting confidence and team work, as well as broadening horizons and raising aspirations. Our *Ignition* project, set up to encourage young men to take part in theatre activities, harnesses this ethos by offering participants an opportunity to train with Frantic Assembly and perform their own work as a physical theatre company.



Ignition Theatre Company in rehearsal, 2008

The quality and ethos of our workshops is so important to us that it is only very recently that we have felt able to hand over our process to a select team of creative practitioners who we know and trust. As our roles and workloads as artistic directors have grown it has become increasingly difficult for us to deliver the workshops ourselves. However, demand for our workshops has continued to grow at a rapid rate (we now work with over 6,000 participants every year!) and we realised the necessity to develop a team of experienced professional artists who could continue delivering these activities on our behalf. The pool of practitioners that now support the Learn and Train programmes have all worked closely with us in the past, they understand our work and we trust them enough to represent Frantic Assembly in schools and colleges across the country. All of our

practitioners are continually in dialogue with us and Inga Hirst, Frantic's Learn and Train Manager, to ensure their ongoing professional development. A structure of skills sharing events and mentoring for these artists has become an essential and exciting element of our Train programme. As a result of investing in this team, the activities have been able to expand and, crucially, improve. We are now able to deliver a vast range of activities all year-round, across the UK and abroad.

It is clear that the way we stumbled into theatre has influenced our desire to bring others into it. People who may have felt alienated by theatre's apparent stuffiness, luvviness and obsession with self justification yet were bursting with energy and a desire to communicate ideas to new audiences. Theatre is a fascinating and fulfilling area to work in, but we got on this route by accident rather than design... by following a girl into a drama group or being pushed into a school performance by a teacher... by meeting each other at university... by watching a play directed by Volcano Theatre Company. We know how important and dynamic the right kind of intervention can be. And we know how inspirational this kind of work can be.

Frantic Assembly hope to offer the same springboard that was so crucial to us. It is this simple desire that means we are constantly looking to improve our Learn and Train programme. We are totally committed to providing the most exciting and relevant workshops for young (and old!) practitioners and students throughout the country.

Managing a company

In the early days, Frantic did everything it could just to make work happen in frequently adverse circumstances. This sometimes meant sailing a little bit close to the wind with things such as rights and health & safety. Many performers and creators (including the artistic directors) gave their time for little payment and production resources were limited. As the company has evolved it has developed an increased level of professionalism. However, finding the necessary production funds to meet the company's increasingly ambitious process and vision remains a challenge because we now operate at a bigger scale. Whilst we can't compete with the fees payable by larger touring companies and theatres we endeavour to provide our collaborators with suitable reward for their brilliance. We are part of an organisation called the Independent Theatre Council (ITC) which helps us contract people fairly and make sure that we create good working conditions for all our staff.

Frantic Assembly is now a (fairly) grown up company. Whilst I hope we have lost none of the passion, incredible work ethic and determination to shake things up that accompanied the early years, we do now have to negotiate things such as board meetings, annual accounts and three-year plans. Good

management enables us to make as much good work as possible, for as many people as possible. But, good management can never compensate for bad art. We don't waste anything and we still take on much more than we can chew on a regular basis... but we love it. If you want to start your own company or pursue a career in the arts then you will need to love it too (even on really bad days when it feels like the world is against you). Organisations like ITC can help you with some of the nuts and bolts stuff which might seem a bit intimidating at first. However I would urge you to start with the basics: what you want to make, who you want to make it with and who you want to see it. I would also point you in the direction of an excellent essay by James Yarker of Stans Café which is available to read on their website at www.stanscafe.co.uk/helpfulthings/firststeps.html.

We are still making mistakes (regularly) but we continue to learn from them (always). If Scott and Steven decided to give it all up tomorrow then we would be incredibly proud of everything Frantic Assembly has achieved. However we have an important philosophy in the rehearsal room and beyond that with everything we do - we should always be moving forward and not spend too much valuable time looking back! We have many exciting new projects in development, giving us a host of new problems to solve, questions to answer, people to meet and places to visit. You can join the Frantic Assembly mailing list to keep up to date with all our production news at www.franticassembly.co.uk.

Funding - an overview

- Frantic Assembly is a not for profit organisation and a charity.
- It is governed by a board of trustees, all of whom are experienced arts professionals.
- Frantic Assembly has been regularly funded by the Arts Council England, through its London office since 2002. The Arts Council distributes public subsidy which is provided by the Department of Culture Media and Sport. In 2012 Frantic Assembly will become a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO).
- This funding supports the company's productions and core costs. Core costs include wages, national insurance, insurance, office overheads, storage, IT, business rates and window cleaning!

Other important sources of income for the company are:

- Fees for work as movement directors or associate artists with other organisations such as the National Theatre, Royal & Derngate, Northampton or Manchester International Festival.
- Fees from the company's extensive programme of Learn and Train activities.
- Grants from trusts and foundations – this is mostly to support free activities for young people that increase access to the arts.
- Touring fees (or 'guarantees') from theatres. Sometimes it is also possible for Frantic Assembly to receive a % of the income from the tickets purchased for our shows - this is referred to as the 'box office'.
- Royalty payments for new productions of scripts that Frantic Assembly have commissioned such as *Lovesong* or *It Snows*. A royalty is an agreed % of the ticket income for a show (minus any credit card or other commissions incurred).
- Another crucial form of income for Frantic Assembly is co-production investment from partners such as theatres or other theatre companies.
- Until 2012 the company also occasionally benefited from additional Arts Council funding via a fund called Grants for the Arts. This particular fund directs money generated from the sale of lottery tickets to good causes in the arts. It is still open to organisations who are not NPOs.

Case study: Creating the Production Budget for Frantic Assembly's *Othello*

The project

Firstly, Scott and Steven spoke to Lisa Maguire, the company's Executive Producer, about their vision for the production and how the project would contribute to the company's long-term artistic and audience development objectives. Next we thought about the scale of the project, the kinds of artists we would like to work with (designers, musicians etc) and the sorts of theatres we would like to work with as co-producers or presenters. We quickly established that this was a strong project to pursue but



Jimmy Akingbola and Charles Aitken
in *Othello*

an ambitious one both in terms of the artistic vision and the resources required to create it. We chose to place the show at the end of a three-year programme of work so that we would have time to find the right project partners and generate the necessary funds.

Creating a detailed budget

In putting together a detailed budget Lisa had to firmly establish what the artistic directors needed to enable them to create this work. This involved asking them a number of questions including:

- How many actors do you need?
- How many weeks of rehearsals do you need?
- Will you need the set in rehearsal?
- How will the creative team be made up?



Poster image for *Othello*, shot at the Union Jack pub in Southwark

Once the outline of the project's main requirements were in place Lisa sought advice from staff in the production and marketing departments at the Theatre Royal Plymouth as well as the production manager and marketing consultants that Frantic Assembly worked with regularly. They all helped us to think about the resources we would need to work confidently at the middle-large scale. Because making theatre is not an exact science we included a healthy contingency to allow for problems or unforeseen circumstances along the way!

However, when we had our dream budget it seemed for a time like the amount of income required would be impossible to achieve so we did have to re-look at some of the elements and make some compromises to ensure the project was a realistic possibility. The number of

rehearsal weeks was reduced from seven to six and the number of performers was reduced from ten to nine. Finally, the Theatre Royal Plymouth bought in an experienced production manager/producer to take a thorough look at the overall budget and give an unbiased opinion on whether the project had been adequately thought through.

Production Partners

Frantic Assembly is funded as a small-scale touring theatre company which makes work for theatres of approximately 150-500 seats. We receive revenue funding from Arts Council England but once we have paid our basic overheads, such as salaries and office expenses, we don't have very much left to make work! The company generates income through a number of other sources including a year-round Learn and Train programme, but in making a new production we need to secure at least one other co-producer (normally a theatre) to work with. This means that they make a financial contribution towards the costs associated with the production and that the show will run there, normally in its first week. Frantic Assembly is very lucky to have developed an on-going relationship with the Theatre Royal Plymouth who has co-produced a number of shows with us in their Drum Theatre (150 seats). We spoke to them very early on in the process about whether they would be interested in working with us on our first Shakespearean production and if they thought the combined popularity of the title and the company would make it possible for us to make our first show together in the Theatre Royal (850 seats)! Luckily they thought it was a good idea and were excited by the ambition of the project. Though, like us, they recognised it was going to be a mammoth task, they really got behind us and helped in developing the budget and in securing other investment. In addition they agreed to build the set and to host some of the rehearsals as well as support the production week, running costs and the marketing of the show in Plymouth. This kind of support and expertise is invaluable.

Initially we set about looking for another one or two co-producers but although there was a lot of interest in Frantic Assembly's *Othello* it became clear to us that it would be difficult to find another theatre who were able to invest at the level we had committed to. However, following the success of Frantic Assembly's collaboration with the Royal & Derngate in Northampton on their production of *Frankenstein* we spoke to them about the possibility of working together again. They agreed to make a financial contribution towards the *Othello*'s development and to run the show in their Royal Theatre for two weeks. This extra support enabled us to finally green light the project.



Jimmy and Claire-Louise as Othello and Desdemona

Other fundraising

The pattern of the tour and the commitment of the all the venues was in place and we now had enough of the money to submit an application to Grants for the Arts for the remaining funds. This grant money also helped us to work at a larger scale with more confidence (i.e. supporting an assistant director's position) and to make the transition to larger spaces with a well resourced marketing and audience development strategy.

Monitoring the budget

Throughout the pre-production period, rehearsals, production week and tour Lisa continued to work closely with partner venues, our production manager and stage managers and marketing representative to monitor every area of the budget. Keeping track of the actual expenditure and adjusting the forecast in each area according to how the work evolves. It is essential that we keep to the budget created which is why it was so important to research and test the budget BEFORE going into production. Anything that has been forgotten or underestimated will jeopardise our ability to complete the project within the budget.

Further information:

Arts Council England
www.artscouncil.org.uk

Grants for the Arts
www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/grants-for-the-arts

Independent Theatre Council
www.itc-arts.org

Marketing Frantic Assembly

Before we had even attended our first business course in 1994, one thing was clear to us. Frantic had to be not just a company but also a brand. It seemed to us (albeit in our limited experience) that if an audience member attended a show by a particular company and had enjoyed that show tremendously, it would be a disaster if the title of the show was the only thing that remained in their memory. If that same company returned to that same venue then it seemed crucial to us that the audience would need to recall the name of the company. We ourselves, on the rare occasions we had made visits to the theatre had been aware of the show title but rarely the company name. This was something we wanted to avoid at all costs. Many theatre companies at that time seemed to hold little interest in this area whilst all around, the advertising and marketing industries worked overtime with extraordinary results in every other artistic field.



Scott in a poster image for *Klub*

To this end we looked to create the Frantic brand using a variety of methods. One was the company name itself. Aside from being the best way to describe ourselves, we changed the name from Frantic Theatre Company to Frantic Assembly in 1997. Initially a choice to avoid a potential legal battle, our name change was just as much an attempt to exceed the bounds of simply being a theatre company. The added 'Assembly' felt true to the company spirit and as a title it just seemed to have more impact. Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton at Sydney Theatre Company described Frantic Assembly as 'the best name we have ever heard' so we are sticking with it for the time being....

The typeface for the logo was taken from a nightclub that was running in Coventry and our promotional flyers were more akin to the style and

format of nightclub flyers that were prevalent at the time. In all aspects, the name Frantic Assembly featured first and foremost - in the most prominent position at all times. Even when describing the show for brochure copy we were relentless in dropping our name. The show wasn't just called *Klub* - it was Frantic Assembly's *Klub*.

By battering our potential audience around the head (and even allowing them to literally buy the t-shirt in the foyer), we set out to create a point where people would talk about going to see 'the new Frantic show', with no show title necessary.

Imagery became, and remains, an essential tool for us. Rather than working with images of the work onstage (normally impossible given the schedule prior to the opening of a new show), we looked to create exciting and unapologetically sexy images to promote the work, often referencing cinematic images and techniques in place of stuffy, stagey and cheap-looking photos. So the poster for our first professional production (*Look Back in Anger*) featured a detail of a woman being drowned. *Tiny Dynamite* featured a young boy in a silver spacesuit springing into the air. *Stockholm* captures a couple the moment before their embrace, whilst bird-like shards explode out from their backs. Popular photographers were hugely influential to us, from Nan Goldin (*Peepshow* promotional poster) to Pierre et Giles (*Heavenly* poster image). In each instance, the ambition was to confound the expectation of the traditional theatre image and instead present a pictorial moment that was provocative and truly contemporary. Each production requires its own different approach and the final result has ranged from locating sourced images of Neanderthal-looking thugs in bunny outfits (*Rabbit*) to naked photo shoots to create our own original image (*Dirty Wonderland*).



Steven and Imogen Knight in the poster image for *Dirty Wonderland*

Despite having a very strong idea as to what we wanted the promotional material for the show to look like, we also required help in the areas of design, PR and marketing. Ben Chamberlain has been a long-term associate with Frantic Assembly and has repeatedly put us in touch with the right people in order to realise our marketing ambitions. It is one thing to come up with great promotional material. The real challenge is then to make sure these things appear in all the right places at the right time.

Marketing is an ever changing landscape and one that forces us to address what it is we do and, more importantly, who we are doing it for. It is these discussions with a marketing company that really force us to consider not what our audience is but what we might want it to be. With every production, we now consider the show and what it

might achieve not just in retaining the existing Frantic audience but also how it might tap into audiences that have never seen a Frantic show before. For example, we felt that our production of *Othello* could be marketed to the traditional Shakespeare audiences who may not have been tempted by a Frantic show previously. Equally, our setting for *Othello* (a pub in Leeds) had relevance to the white working class communities around the areas we toured to and was an opportunity to entice the local community to their theatre - possibly for the first time. After identifying a particular strand of audience member that might be new to us, there are then a variety of means by which we might look to attract them into seeing their first Frantic production such as reduced ticket rates, special offers on group bookings, bespoke talks, or tours of the set after the performance. All such methods are seen as a means of investing in the future of Frantic as well as developing its audience base. Any company working with a modern sensibility should constantly be on the lookout to expand their market base and theatre is no exception.



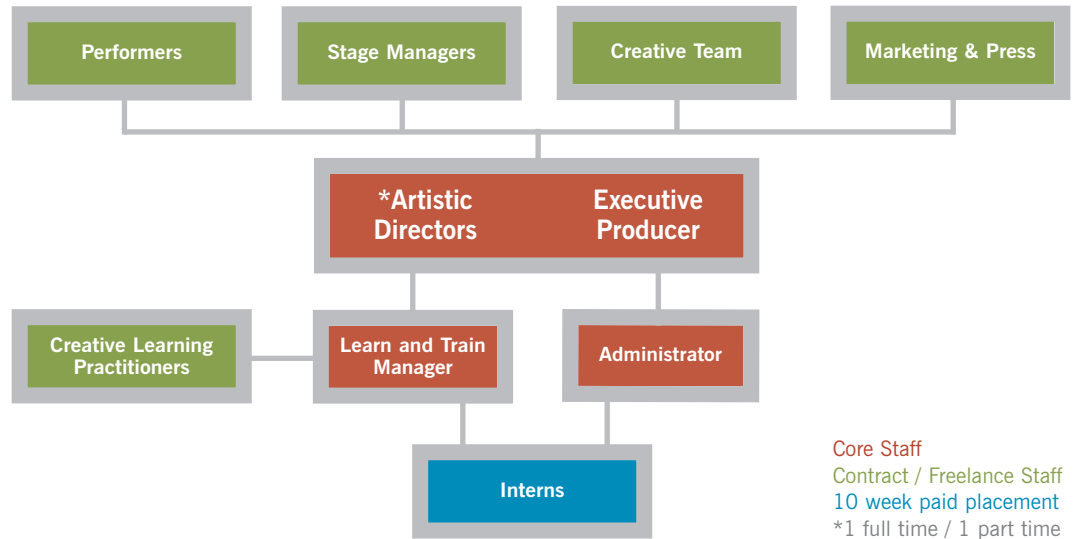
Image of a sculpture by John Isaccs used for the publicity of *Rabbit* in 2003

Aside from newspapers, magazines and listings in journals or publications, there are many other methods of marketing a Frantic production. We now incorporate a strong internet campaign that looks to make the most of the existing Frantic website as well as cross-pollinating with other arts organisations and events in order to publicise an event. For the *Othello* production this involved spot trailers, sneak previews, interviews, clips from the rehearsal room and finally an official promotional trailer. Timing is crucial to a marketing campaign in creating a sense of expectation for the event and building this over a specific period so that everything hits at the right time in a coordinated and synchronised way. The fact that we often collaborate with bands and recording artists means that we are able to tap into the music-buying and concert-going market too by way of internet sites, radio stations and music publications. Every element of the proposed production is considered in terms of its appeal to different audience types and we then look at the best ways to capitalise on this.

Frantic promotional material will normally feature quotes from existing work and in this way gives even the first timer some sense of what they might expect from seeing a Frantic show. The trick here is to be dazzling but also not propose an event that is beyond your means. Promising the finest theatrical experience of a lifetime is not such a good promotional tactic. We are careful to choose words (and images) that we truly believe represent the work on stage. This is not always easy as it is often the case that we have to provide copy for a production before we have even stepped into the rehearsal room. In such instances, press quotes for previous work are incredibly valuable.

It is no coincidence that the name Frantic has been mentioned nineteen times in this section - all part of the process!

Company Structure



Frantic FAQ

There are questions that we get asked that are impossible to answer. Others are inspirational. We will try to address some of the most common questions in this section.

We do not have a manifesto written in stone. It is only when we respond to these questions that we get to consider what our opinions are. Because we formed the company as artistic directors we have been in the privileged position of being able to make the work that we want to make. So much of theatre is geared to facilitating a writer and producing their plays and we are thankful that we can dip in and out of this world when it suits us. It also means that we seldom consider our reasons for doing things. We just do them. Your questions are our opportunity to take stock, reflect and sound like we know what we are talking about.

What is physical theatre?

People have asked us about our position or our contribution to the physical theatre genre. We find this an extremely difficult question to answer. We are not even sure what the physical theatre genre is. We have frequently avoided answering the question 'what is physical theatre?' partly through boredom but mostly through ignorance. We do not feel that we are qualified to give a definitive response and actually feel that our answer may be counter productive to the search for that definition. We can talk about the theatre that we make but have a limited understanding as to where it sits in contemporary theatre let alone in an historical sense.

Our understanding is that the genre is fairly vast and encompasses areas that are of little or no interest to us theatrically. It is likely that the academic theatre goer asking this question is actually in a better position to answer it.

Volcano Theatre Company has written about the genre on their web site and the reader may find their definition at odds to their own: www.volcanotheatre.co.uk/128/resources/essays-and-articles.html And this proves my point. Maybe it is best not to come looking to the companies for a definition of physical theatre. Maybe we are too close to it and 'can't see the woods for the trees.'

How do you begin devising a show?

How indeed? Now, is this question asking us how WE would go about it or is it asking how ONE would begin devising? It is important not to feel responsible for everyone who wants to devise their own work. They will find a way that suits their needs. Like us, often through painful trial and error.

It is important that the reader accepts that any answer only reflects how WE might begin devising a show. I also think there is a preconception here. I often feel that devising implies that we have gone into a room with nothing and tried to make a start from scratch. This is not the case. It may take years for an idea to get into the rehearsal room and before it does it has been batted back and forth between the directors, reshaped and presented to producers and other collaborators. It has been

presented to a writer too, who may be engaged to create a full draft for the first day of rehearsal. That script becomes the launch pad and inspiration for most of the devising process.

Devising is not to the exclusion of working with a writer. We give the writer freedom to develop a text in response to our ideas and conversations, but do not just expect the writer to be inspired by what is created in the rehearsal room. The partnership with a writer should be completely collaborative.

As we develop our rehearsal process we have been taking advantage of the generous opportunities to try out ideas through establishments like the National Theatre Studios or Battersea Arts Centre. This is much more like the preconception of devising but it is without the reductive pressure of existing within a dwindling rehearsal time. It is focussed and disciplined but it is definitely the time to be playing with 'what if?'

This Research and Development can be physically led, or it could be about developing story and text. We might explore character work either textually or physically but all work will be within a clearly defined parameters. We would have talked about our aims and created techniques to explore them, partly wanting to be proved successful and partly wanting to be surprised by the outcome.

The point I am making is that we have refined this approach to making theatre over the years. We initially create the kernel of the idea and test this to see if it is interesting enough to us and if 'it has got legs' - whether it will stand up to scrutiny and be interesting to anyone else. This 'testing' is pretty much talking about the idea, letting it sit for a while and then returning to it with a wiser head to see if it still excites us.

Then we take it into development with as many of our collaborators as possible on board. Here we flesh it out and hopefully come out with a much bigger idea that would then go into the rehearsal stage where a full script would be presented. This might take a couple of years. It might not sound like devising to you but it is the way we work.

All devising is broken down into tasks. These remain bite sized and self contained. They never set out to encapsulate the whole production idea or solve the entire demands of the text. They are always as simple as we can make them. They are merely building blocks that are created to support more blocks.



Production shot for *Hymns*, 2005

By setting tasks you allow your performers much more creative input into the devising process without burdening them with the responsibility of creating the whole thing. Shaping theatre and choreography requires the outside eye of a director and this objective influence can liberate the performer to be brave, take risks and try new things. As directors/choreographers we are also liberated, as the performer is now providing a palette so much larger and richer than our own imaginations could provide. For us, this relationship and process allows the performers and directors to use their full imaginations and leads us to work with ideas we would never have thought about otherwise.

We are firm believers that limitations can create freedom and spark the imagination. We are certainly not for the suffering of the artist. We believe that one of the worst things we can do is enter a rehearsal room empty handed. We would find a blank page terrifying and debilitating. Asking performers to improvise in this void can be counter productive too.

It is the pain of personal experience that has shaped this approach, as well as the influences and approaches of the very talented choreographers we have worked with. They recognised the need to simplify things for us, to see what we could do and then use this. We responded to their use of rules and parameters and have taken this process on as our own.

This is probably why we never teach choreography from the front of the room. In rehearsals we never teach 'steps.' The moves come from what the performers find they are capable of through the specific tasks set. We believe this is the most productive, honest and accessible method for us.

Why do you use contemporary music?

We use contemporary music because this is what tends to inspire us. We do not use it exclusively but we are massive music fans and find that a lot of our ideas come from music. We have quite eclectic music collections and use whatever excites us at the time.

The word contemporary gets used a lot in reference to our company. This is surely because we make work that reflects topics we are currently talking about, and are of interest to us. As we are inspired by the people and the world around us it is no surprise that the work is contemporary and made by contemporary means - the music we are listening to, the designers who are exciting us, etc.

How is design integrated into the creative process of your pieces?

Design is a very important element of the creative process. For example, we do our best to have our designer involved in the research and development sessions. We want them to absorb as much of the process as possible, to comment on movement ideas, observe the potential character work and get a feel for the aims of the project. While this approach encourages a collaborative rehearsal room there is also a very practical reason for this intense, initial involvement of the designer that have ramifications for all of our producing partners and their technical departments. We need to have the set in the rehearsal room with us, from the beginning of rehearsals if possible⁶. This is so important for our kind of work, as the performers need to fully integrate and use the set. They need to know its physical limitations and possibilities. Testing this will offer all kinds of choreographic and theatrical inspiration.



Production shot from *Heavenly*

Therefore, the set itself becomes a creative element in the process and not just something the performance exists on or in front of. This is crucial for our integrated physical work.

The importance of the designer to our work cannot be underestimated. Initially we worked without a designer, having to come up with rudimentary sketches and take them off to the scary Mitchell Brothers⁷ at a forge in Swansea. Designing and sourcing the set for *Underworld* literally made us ill. It felt uninspired and we were never sure whether we were making terrible mistakes. The final set actually worked well but the experience taught us that we never wanted to be in that situation again. We HAD to find the money to engage a designer for our next production.

As ever with us, and I am always stunned that we managed to pull this off, we aimed high. We commissioned award winning designer Dick Bird for *Heavenly* and for the first time we had something solid and clearly 'set-like' to play with.

Sometimes the collaborative process between all creatives is smooth and complimentary. On *Tiny Dynamite*, Julian Crouch's set was inspired by work and ideas presented within the rehearsal room and it offered the perfect palette for Natasha Chivers' beautiful lighting. At other times the designer's aesthetic can cause problems for other creatives. Having as many of your creatives as possible around from the start of research and development can prevent some of these clashes as everyone is on the same page and can see how their skills can fit together.

Working with Laura Hopkins on *Stockholm* and *Othello* has been a revelation. The first *Stockholm* research and development session was so productive and threw up so many possibilities. Laura absorbed them all and then came back to us in the second research and development session with sketches for a design that would offer our entire wish-list and more in the most remarkable playground of a set that captured all the beauty, danger, love, aspiration, sexiness and brutality we felt existed in the world of *Stockholm*.

It was so thrilling to see how someone's skill and imagination could take what we could only dream about and make them real. But even saying that is doing a disservice to the impact and input Laura had on our production of *Stockholm*.

Bryony and ourselves had been struggling to capture an essence of danger, insecurity and self loathing we felt we needed for a certain scene. We all felt it would be great if the character Kali could feel so threatened by the situation that the room she is in, or something in the room attacks her. Bryony loved the symbolism of a huge telescope attacking her. It made perfect and precise psychological sense within *Stockholm*, but how to achieve it troubled us. Then Laura presented her idea. What if the desk appears real but is actually made of water and it is this desk that pulls her within and almost drowns her? It was a beautiful idea but the genius was in making it work. This stunning effect was a crucial moment in *Stockholm*. It was a moment that we would never have come close to solving without the particular eye of and input from our designer.

⁶ Not all companies can work this way. It is a credit to our producers and co producers that this is possible.

⁷ Not really brothers. Not even Mitchells. But definitely scary. They were a couple of metalworkers who would construct sets for us and had an uncanny resemblance to Phil and Grant Mitchell from *Eastenders*.

Things you didn't ask, but might want to know



Production shot from *Lovesong*

- On average Frantic Assembly works with over 6000 people through the Learn and Train programme each year.
- Frantic Assembly has 5 permanent members of staff.
- Our mean average height is 5ft 7 inches (and a half).
- There are 10 practitioners who lead workshops and residencies for Frantic Assembly.
- We performed in front of an audience of over 900 people in Taiwan (2000).
- The total audience for the tour of *Beautiful Burnout* in 2010-11 was 34,031.
- We performed in front of an audience of 1 in Manchester, 1995 (over 2 nights. We had to cancel the first night because there was no audience!).
- Our largest cast size was 29 for *Dirty Wonderland* in 2005. *Stockholm* had our smallest cast size of 2 in 2007.
- By March 2012 we will have performed, taught or created shows in 30 different countries. (33 if you split the UK).
- Between 2006 – 2011, over 110,000 audience members attended a Frantic Assembly production at one of 24 partner venues in the UK and internationally.
- The first Frantic casualty - a broken nose - occurred within the first 30 minutes of the first ever rehearsal.
- Performances of *Klub* in Ecuador were at such altitude that the performers had to keep rushing into the wings in order to use oxygen tanks that had been provided for the performance.
- During the first performance of *Flesh*, Steven was confused as to what was supposed to happen next and accidentally pulled his pants down.
- Robert Lepage saw a performance of *Flesh* in Italy on the same night that Scott encountered a stalker in his dressing room after the show.
- In 2000, Frantic turned down an invite to appear on *Blue Peter*.
- The first Frantic touring van was an old Electricity Board van. It wasn't legally equipped to carry passengers in the back so the performers had to hide under blankets whenever the police drove by.
- Whilst rehearsing a scene with dried flowers and white spirit, two members of the company accidentally set fire to a dressing room during our first tour. (Not saying who or which venue).
- In Syria, performances of *Sell Out* came under scrutiny by the police due to the kissing content of the show.
- The title *Tiny Dynamite* was derived from a Cocteau Twins song called *Tiny Dynamine*.
- Excluding the volunteer cast of *Dirty Wonderland*, National Theatre's *Market Boy* and MIF's *Dr Dee*, our shows have consisted of 56 male roles and 43 female roles.
- Frantic's first public appearance was on TV as part of *Challenge Anneka* in 1994 when Anneka Rice had 48 hours to totally renovate the dilapidated Patti Pavilion in Swansea and open it with a gala performance. Frantic provided a 5-minute physical piece based on a toilet queue. In May 2012 Frantic Assembly return to Swansea to create *Little Dogs* for the National Theatre of Wales – at the Patti Pavilion!
- In July 2011, at 4.30pm on the day of the press night, we convinced Damon Albarn to fall 3.5 metres backwards off the set and on to a tiny crash mat for the final moment of *Doctor Dee* at the Manchester International Festival.
- We performed as backing dancers for Boy George in front of a bemused crowd of 10,000 13 year old girls in Frankfurt.

Production History



Lovesong by Abi Morgan (2011)

Lovesong intertwines a couple in their 20s with the same man and woman a lifetime later. Their past and present selves collide in this haunting and beautiful tale of togetherness.

Frantic Assembly and Drum Theatre Plymouth in association with Chichester Festival Theatre and UK tour.

'achingly beautiful... directed and choreographed with imaginative precision and poignancy'

The Independent



Beautiful Burnout by Bryony Lavery (2010)

A thrilling, highly physical piece that immerses the audience in the explosive world of boxing, challenging preconceptions about the most controversial sport of our time.

A Frantic Assembly and National Theatre of Scotland production and UK tour. Played at St Ann's Warehouse, New York in 2011 and Sydney Festival, Perth International Arts Festival and New Zealand International Arts Festival in 2012.

'This is stunning. Literally and metaphorically' The Independent on Sunday



Othello by William Shakespeare adapted by Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett (2008)

An electrifying take on Shakespeare's most brutal and gripping thriller-tragedy of paranoia, jealousy, sex and murder.

Frantic Assembly and Theatre Royal Plymouth in association with Royal & Derngate Northampton and UK tour.

'The tragedy gains an electrifying new vigor and relevance' The Independent on Sunday



Stockholm by Bryony Lavery (2007)

Treading a fine line between tenderness and cruelty, Stockholm reveals a relationship unravelling. It's beautiful, but it's not pretty.

A Frantic Assembly and Drum Theatre Plymouth production and UK tour. Revived for performances at Brighton Festival and Hampstead Theatre in 2008.

'This latest show from Frantic Assembly comes together like a perfectly designed piece of flat packed furniture and is a sinister joy' The Guardian



pool (no water) by Mark Ravenhill (2006)

A visceral and shocking play about the fragility of friendship and the jealousy and resentment inspired by success.

A Frantic Assembly, Drum Theatre Plymouth and Lyric Hammersmith production and UK tour.

'This is a tough, moving, scorching play' The Sunday Times



Dirty Wonderland scripted by Michael Wynne and devised by the Company (2005)

A unique guided tour of excess through the ballrooms and bedrooms of a Brighton hotel.

Commissioned by the Brighton Festival, a sell out production at the Grand Ocean Hotel, Saltdean.

'Faultless and mesmerising. This production is a triumphant show' The Guardian



Hymns by Chris O'Connell (1999/2000, revived in 2005)

A sadistic hunt for weakness, four friends push each other until something snaps.

Original production commissioned by the Gantry, Southampton Arts Centre and produced in association with Lyric Hammersmith. Toured the UK, Columbia, Italy Ireland and Taiwan after a sell out run in London.

'A startling match of sober subject matter and dazzling choreography' Time Out Critic's Choice



On Blindness by Glyn Cannon (2004)

A serious comedy about the complications of perception and desire.

A Frantic Assembly, Paines Plough and Graeae production which toured to Birmingham Rep, West Yorkshire Playhouse and Soho Theatre London.

'Enriching, explorative and slick...Pioneering' The Independent on Sunday



Rabbit by Brendan Cowell (2003)

A snappy, surreal farce in which Frantic tackles the dysfunctional family and brings it to its knees.

A Frantic Assembly and Drum Theatre Plymouth production supported by Lakeside Arts Centre.

'Once again Frantic Assembly proves why it is the company of the moment with a production of stunning physicality. The performances are to die for' The Guardian



Peepshow by Isabel Wright (2002)

A musical which tells the story of seven little lives in one big city.

Frantic Assembly in association with the Drum Theatre Plymouth and Lyric Hammersmith. Supported by Barclays Stage Partners. Toured the UK and sold out during three week London run.

'Thrilling, vigorous, tough and funny... one of the best pieces of physical theatre I've seen'

The Sunday Times



Heavenly by Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Liam Steel (2002)

59 things that will never happen to you again once you are dead.

Toured the UK, played London's West End and after several international dates played off-Broadway for three weeks.

'Inspired... it makes the afterlife look divine' Time Out New York



Tiny Dynamite by Abi Morgan (2001)

An impossible love story is given a second chance and three scorched characters learn that lightning does strike twice.

Paines Plough and Frantic Assembly with Contact. Winner of Best Fringe Production Manchester Evening News Awards and Best Theatre Show, City Life Magazine. Toured UK, Edinburgh Festival, London, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Italy and Finland.

'This is surely the bright new future of theatre' The Independent



Underworld by Nicola McCartney (2001)

Hard, dark, fast and frightening. A ghost story for the 21st century with a breathtaking mix of touching realism and bruising physicality.

Toured the UK, London and Slovakia.

'A breakthrough - an old fashioned (that's to say tight and exciting) horror story given wings by supple gymnastic technique' The Observer



Sell Out by Michael Wynne (1998)

An argument grows from an honest word among friends. And it grows quickly. Sell Out starts with a whisper snowballing to an irresistible force spiralling out of control.

A UK tour culminated in a West End run at the New Ambassadors Theatre, for which it won the Time Out Live Theatre Award. Toured Finland, France, Zimbabwe, Lebanon, Syria and Ireland.

'A knockout piece of theatre - brilliantly written and performed, savagely perceptive, cutting edgy stuff' Manchester Evening News

Generation Trilogy (1998)

Klub, Flesh and Zero toured throughout the UK in summer 1998.



Zero devised by the company (1998)

The house party where all is revealed before the clock strikes in the new millennium.

Premiered at the 1998 Edinburgh Festival and toured the UK Holland, Switzerland, Austria, Singapore and Hungary.

'This is work of startling originality, this is breathtaking new ground...the bleeding edge of contemporary theatre' The Stage



Flesh by Spencer Hazel (1996/97)

Four performers offer their bodies for the price of a ticket.

Toured the UK and Europe, a huge hit at the Edinburgh Festival and in Germany Italy, Spain, Hungary and Holland.

'Interesting, intelligent, sexy and sad: a lippy, witty 80 minutes of dynamic dance theatre. A brash, confident shove-it-in-ye-face show. Highly recommended' The Guardian



Klub by Spencer Hazel (1995/96)

A relentless look at the importance of club culture in mid-nineties Britain.

Premiered at the Edinburgh Festival, toured the UK and played Ecuador with the British Council.

'Not theatre for the faint hearted. An exhilarating spectacle... terrifically enjoyable theatre that really engages with an audience' Time Out



Look Back in Anger by John Osborne adapted by Spencer Hazel (1994)

A new version of the 1960's classic 'angry young man' drama.

Premiered at the Edinburgh Festival and toured the UK until September 1995.

'Believe me it's amazing... a fantastically physical piece of theatre'

Steven Berkoff for BBC's Edinburgh Nights

Where can I find out more about Frantic Assembly?

Our website is a good place to start! www.franticassembly.co.uk

There is information on all aspects of the company, past and present as well as resource packs about our shows. These packs have proved very successful and offer readers an insight into Frantic's creative and rehearsal process: www.franticassembly.co.uk/resources

Try www.google.co.uk and typing in Frantic Assembly. You are met with articles of varying degrees of usefulness from the completely out of date to the fascinating review or interview. It is well worth making the trawl. Maybe you'll find out something about us that even we don't know!

Look out for hidden gems like these:

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/video/2011/oct/11/frantic-assembly-abi-morgan-eliot-video

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/sep/20/beautiful-burnout-frantic-assembly

www.whatsonstage.com/interviews/theatre/london/E8831284039456/Brief+Encounter+With+...+Bryony+Lavery.html

www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2011/02/23/theater/20110223-burnout-4.html

www.brooklynrail.org/2011/03/theater/lacing-on-the-gloves-beautiful-burnout-hits-st-anns-warehouse

arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1876556,00.html

arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1270477,00.html

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/may/16/theatre2

www.timeout.com/london/theatre/features/2180.html

www.imogenheap.co.uk/iblog/2006/10/flight-no-ai-111.html

entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/theatre/article4758749.ece

blogs.birminghampost.net/lifestyle/2008/10/wild-and-windy-moor.html#more

apsenglishliterature.edublogs.org/2008/11/06/frantic-assemblys-production/

www.connectingconversations.org/?location_id=2&item=43

www.connectingconversations.org/?location_id=2&item=197

www.theatrevoice.com/listen_now/player/?audioID=632

www.youtube.com/watch?v=oa3ZzFzjJ0o

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHtfaORGPCc&feature=youtube_gdata_player

Surfing through this material you might see a few names cropping up. These might be practitioners we have collaborated with - writers, directors, performers and designers. Some names to look out for and people who have been very influential in the development and success of the company are:

Neil Bettles	Bryony Lavery
Miriam Beuther	Vicki Middleton
Dick Bird	Abi Morgan
Natasha Chivers	Rufus Norris
Cait Davis	Dan O'Neill
Vicky Featherstone	Perou
Spencer Hazel	Andy Purves
Laura Hopkins	Mark Ravenhill
TC Howard	Liam Steel
Eddie Kay	Simon Stokes
Steve Kirkham	John Tiffany
Georgina Lamb	

If you are looking for cast lists from our past shows then return to our website. Look at productions and then creative team: www.franticassembly.co.uk/productions/current

There are also photographs from these productions and films scattered throughout the web site. In particular:

www.franticassembly.co.uk/productions/past/

www.franticassembly.co.uk/showreel/

www.franticassembly.co.uk/productions/lovesong/videos/

www.franticassembly.co.uk/productions/beautiful-burnout/videos/

Alternatively you could look at YouTube site for more films:

www.youtube.com/franticassembly

These get updated, as does the website and the best way to stay abreast of any changing information is to join our mailing list at www.franticassembly.co.uk/subscribe/



Gloves on, Bryony Lavery in Glasgow researching *Beautiful Burnout*

This will mean you will get updates and first news about productions and the company's ongoing creative Learn and Train programme. Details on this can be found at:

www.franticassembly.co.uk/learn/

www.franticassembly.co.uk/train/

Frantic Assembly are now on Twitter. Follow @franticassembly to see tweets from Scott about the latest Frantic news, updates from the rehearsal room and tours and other ramblings. You can also read the latest tweets from and about us on our website at www.franticassembly.co.uk/talking/

We also have an online Forum at our website. This is a free and easy to use resource for people to talk to us and each other about Frantic's work. Visit the Forum to read the discussion that has started already and get involved at www.franticassembly.co.uk/forum

Occasionally the artistic directors can be found cropping up in other production credits through their freelance work and as movement directors for Frantic on other people's shows. Try googling:

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

Doctor Dee

American Idiot

The Bacchae

Black Watch

The May Queen

365

Market Boy

Mercury Fur

Home Inverness

Helen Chadwick

Or you could check out a beautiful, award winning advert choreographed by Steven Hoggett for Orange mobile phones: www.ephinx.com/tvads/129/orange-harmonious-dance-advert.html



Sam Cox and Leanne Rowe in *Lovesong*

Photography by:

Sam Barker

Brett Boardman

Gavin Evans

Scott Graham

Fiona Gregory

Manuel Harlan

John Haynes

Spencer Hazel

John Hunter

John Isaccs

Andrew Jones

Marilyn Kingwill

Jonathan Littlejohn

Sandro Martini

Helen Maybanks

Andy Paraskos

Perou

Johan Persson

David Sibley



Vicki Manderson and Ryan Fletcher in *Beautiful Burnout*

The Company

Scott Graham & Steven Hoggett (Artistic Directors)

Lisa Maguire (Executive Producer)

Inga Hirst (Learn and Train Manager)

Alex Turner (Administrator)

Frantic Assembly

31 Eyre Street Hill, London EC1R 5EW

admin@franticassembly.co.uk

www.franticassembly.co.uk