

17 July 2020

Oldham Coliseum and DANC explore ‘Distance’ through the experiences of disabled artists

Oldham Coliseum Theatre and **TripleC/DANC** have joined forces to commission, produce and present three short audio plays by disabled writers, based on the theme of ‘Distance’. Inspired by the writers’ real-life experiences the five-minute plays offer insight into the emotional challenges faced by disabled people in managing their conditions, shielding and the easing of the UK lockdown.

TripleC is a disabled led arts organisation that creates projects to break down the barriers for people with disabilities accessing the arts. **DANC** is the professional strand of **TripleC**; it champions solution-focussed events, workshops and conversations between disabled artists and key industry decision makers to increase representation, inclusivity and employment of disabled artists in the arts and media sector.

In May **Oldham Coliseum**, **TripleC** and **DANC** invited writers who are part of **DANC** to submit short plays up to five-minutes in length based on the theme of ‘Distance’ for the fourth episode of the theatre’s Mini-Podcast Series.

Actors Cherylee Houston and Melissa Johns (co-creators of TripleC/DANC) said: “*We’ve loved working with Oldham Coliseum on the mini plays! DANC has such a wealth of talent and it’s been great to offer creative opportunities during such an uncertain time*”

The three selected short plays produced for the episode are: ***Personal Space*** by **Adam Fenton**; ***From a Distance*** by **Andrew Duffy** and ***25 Metres From Salsa*** by **Karen Featherstone**. All actors cast in the episode are also members of **DANC**.

Personal Space is a piece about when the smallest of acts feel massive, how distance is relative and why closeness isn’t always about proximity. Sam wants to enjoy the vast expanse of the known universe, but he can’t do that without some crisps. The corner shop is just down the road but that feels like a lightyear away for this would-be space explorer. He must find a way to make a leap into a world that feels so alien, the one just outside his front door. Writer **Adam Fenton** trained as an actor at ALRA North and has since been pursuing a career in writing and performing. He has worked at BAC, with Graeae Theatre on *Crips Without Constraints* and is currently developing a new play about Tourette’s Syndrome.

Adam Fenton commented: “*During lockdown I, like many people, have been experiencing anxiety about leaving the house. To counteract this I’ve been doing a lot of writing to keep my mind occupied so when I saw the opportunity to write for the Coliseum’s Mini-Podcast Series I knew I wanted to submit something. With an hour to go before submissions closed I realised that instead of trying to distract from my anxiety I should explore it through writing and combine it with something that gives me comfort, space!*”

Personal Space is read by actor **Milton Lopes**, whose credits include *The Threepenny Opera* (Graeae Theatre Company, New Wolsey Theatre, Nottingham Playhouse, West Yorkshire Playhouse and Birmingham Rep); *Titus Andronicus* (The Theory of Everything at Peckham multi-story car park); *Our Country's Good* (Ramps On The Moon); *The Three Musketeers* (The Dukes Lancaster); *Death Of A Salesman* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester); *Splash* (Extraordinary Bodies) and the Paralympic Opening Ceremonies.

From a Distance is a conversation between a man who is shielding at home and his grandmother who is living with dementia and is shielding in a care home. Writer **Andrew Duffy** has been involved with TripleC and DANC since 2018. He has performed his own work for CO:Lab at Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester, acted with Manchester ADP at The Lowry in Salford, OffCut at Manchester's 53Two and last summer performed his own eight-minute comedy for BBC Ouch at the Edinburgh Festival which was shown on BBC2.

Andrew Duffy commented: *"From A Distance was inspired by my daily conversations with my nan. She has dementia and lives in a care home in Romiley. Sadly, we lost my granddad, who also lived there, in February, but she is not aware as it would've been too hard for her. She has had coronavirus whilst in the home but was asymptomatic. She really enjoys our chats every day. As we are both shielding I was playing around with her interpretation of the world. Like everyone, I look forward to the day we can meet up and hug our loved ones again."*

From A Distance is read by **Caron Rae-Brand** and **Fergus Rattigan**. Caron's credits include: *Cheers to the Children* (writer – Old Barber's Shop, Glasgow) and *The Most Horrific* and *Chair Life* (Theatre Uncut). Fergus's credits include: *Our Country's Good* (Ramps On The Moon) and *Wizard of Oz* (Storyhouse, Chester). During the UK lockdown Fergus has appeared in *Henry IV part II* (The Show Must Go Online); *Richard III* and *As You Like It* (Shake-Scene Shakespeare) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Worldwide Shakespeare).

In **25 Metres From Salsa** we meet Alf as he has his walking assessed to see if he is eligible for a medication to improve it. Writer **Karen Featherstone** received a Northern Writers' Award in 2015. She has spent time in the story offices of *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*, in an alumna of Graeae Theatre's Write to Play initiative.

Karen Featherstone commented: *"25 Metres From Salsa is inspired by my experience of having medication withheld until symptoms worsened. I wanted Alf to occupy that strange headspace in which he knows his condition must deteriorate in order for it to have the best chance of improving"*.

25 Metres From Salsa is read by **Porcelain Delaney**, **Simon Startin** and **Caron Rae-Brand**. Porcelain's credits include: *Rigoletto* (Blackpool Grand Theatre, Manchester Opera House and Liverpool Empire); *Peter Pan* (International tour) and *Hamlet* (UK tour). Simon's credits include: *The Visit* (National Theatre); *Romeo & Juliet* and *Richard III* (Shakespeare's Rose) and *Ralegh* (Shakespeare's Globe).

Oldham Coliseum Theatre's Mini-Podcast Series was launched on World Theatre Day 2020, just one week into the UK lockdown. It shares original works by people of all ages and backgrounds from the communities the theatre serves. For each episode the Coliseum invites writers to respond to a theme within a specified length, with pieces ranging from 100 words to a 20-minute short audio-play.

All pieces in the series are recorded remotely by professional actors and edited by the theatre's Digital Associate **Grant Archer**.

The Coliseum's Mini-Podcast Series is free to access. It is available online at: coliseum.org.uk/mini-podcast-series/.

- Ends -----

Notes to Editor:

For further press information, please contact Shelly Ramsdale via email at shellyramsdale@coliseum.org.uk (please note I am currently working from home)

COVID-19 and Oldham Coliseum Theatre

Oldham Coliseum Theatre's building on Fairbottom Street in Oldham town centre is temporarily closed. The theatre closed to the public with immediate effect on Monday 16 March, following UK Government advice that people should avoid public buildings including theatres. The Coliseum's teams are working remotely to create art and opportunities which can be shared online so that audiences and participants can access them from home. Coliseum staff are also making regular phone calls with the theatre's most vulnerable older participants in place of the theatre's regular social activities and distributing art and craft packs from a safe distance to people in the local communities so that they can participate in creative activities at home.

Oldham Coliseum Theatre has only closed once before in its 135-year history. If you are able and would like to support the Coliseum at this difficult time the theatre asks that audiences consider donating all or part of their ticket costs for cancelled events, or donating online at coliseum.org.uk/your-coliseum-needs-you . Oldham Coliseum Theatre is a Registered Charity (no. 508829)



Oldham Coliseum Theatre is a cultural and educational charity that works with over 150,000 individuals per year.

The Coliseum has a rich history in Greater Manchester dating back to 1885. It provides a wide variety of distinctive theatre performances and participatory activities for people from all communities in Oldham,

Greater Manchester and beyond. It creates original productions each year which are presented at the Coliseum and on tour. Intrinsic to the town's on-going regeneration, the theatre works with its local communities and young people to develop creative programmes to facilitate learning, engagement and community cohesion.

www.coliseum.org.uk

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TripleC is a disabled led arts organisation that creates projects to break down the barriers for people with disabilities accessing the arts. This is through a 360 approach focussing on professional disabled artists through to audiences and the grass roots of youth theatre, schools and colleges.

tripleczone.org

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DANC (Disabled Artists Networking Community) is one of TripleC's major strands. It is the professional strand that champions solution focussed events, workshops and conversations between disabled artists and key industry decision makers to increase representation, inclusivity and employment of disabled artists in the arts and media sector.

tripleczone.org/danc

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