

Live Art in Scotland: Tony Sweeten

This interview was conducted in the James Arnott Theatre, Gilmorehill Centre on 23rd June 2021 as part of the Live Art in Scotland research project at the University of Glasgow.

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Stephen Greer (SG): Maybe I can start with that the question I suggested in the email, which was to ask about how you how you [came into working in theatre]. What was your background as a theatre technician?

Tony Sweeten (TS): My background.. just before that, my background was in sound. Yeah. So it was all music based. And I was working at the concert hall at the time. And then I got the gig here [at the G12 venue] in 1999, around about then. Yes, September 1999, I started here and started doing more theatre stuff, because they had [originally] employed me as the sound person in here. And that kind of moved on from there. And the person I worked with in here, Ruth, at the time, her husband, Paul, he was a theatre technician and a sort of chippy as well, but he did the National Review of Live Art. And he was literally 'do you fancy it? do you fancy coming to do it?' I'd never done it before. And I think that was around about 2001, 2001. And everything we did in here [at the University] was quite straight theatre.

SG: So 'traditional' theatre?

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T: Even the student stuff was at that point was quite text-based, I mean, quite traditional.

SG: And then so the stuff that was we're talking about.. the building was the G12.

TS: Because we were a receiving house and were kind of in the middle ground of.. in between the Tron and the Citz, for example, I mean, a small 100, 150 seater. And people would put us on their tour list, d'you know what I mean? More straight theatre - so 7:84 and all those kind of companies, Rain Dog, they all came through here and it was all quite straight, run of the mill. And then I went to the National Review and I remember the first day going in and going 'fucking hell, what's going on?' [laughter]

SG: There was no warning when your friend asked you to come and do it?

TS: I said 'what's this about?' And he said 'oh, it's just people did some art stuff' so I'm like 'okay'. And there was something going on in every single space in the building which I loved. It was very punk rock as well which blew me away because I was so into DIY punk rock stuff at that time. And I thought, God this is the theatre equivalent, d'you know what I mean? Because it really was. And there was something going on in every single corner of the whole building. And people using basically what they had, which I really liked. Rather than going I need this and I need that, they were saying I've got this and I would really like if I could maybe add to with this to create something. That was fantastic. And so the first years kind of flashed by me, I guess..

SG: Was that the Arches or was that..

TS: Yeah, I never went to the Tramway, I left. I didn't do it after I left it the Treamway, sorry, after after it left the Arches because New Moves in.. Sorry, am I wrong?

SG: So New Moves International was the company but New Moves was also the dance festival. And then later on it became New Territories incorporating the National Review of Live Art. I might have gotten that wrong, and I'm supposed to.. it's taken me a while to get that straight.

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TS: It was mad, and there was all sorts going on. And it was just a constant thing. There was one story I remember actually from my first year. Everybody was complaining, all the tech staff were complaining about having sore knees. And it was basically because the concrete floor in the Arches, right, and you're walking from one end to the other, constantly taking cables back. And Mark Ritchie, I think it was Mark Ritchie who was the production manager. And he was like 'I sorted it'. We go in for a meeting one morning, 'I've sorted it' and he gave us all one of those three-wheel micro-scooters, they had just appeared on the scene so we all had these wee micro-scooters [laughter] and he'd be in the radio, d'you know what I mean? 'Can you bring up an AUX cable up to Arch one' or whatever, and you'd be like 'aye, no bother' nmd you'd just scoot up to deliver this cable. [laughter]. I became really proficient, you know what I mean, we were all doing tricks by the end of the festival. So that's one of the memories that triggered when you mentioned.. 'remember when we had those wee scooters?' [laughter]

SG: I'd not heard.. of all the stories of the time at the Arches..

TS: It's really funny to me because you'd just see somebody go past on a scooter with a cable.

SG: Did you know The Arches as a space before that?

TS: I did, I did a few things in there. I did an Edwin Morgan thing and I did a show called Someone who'll watch over me in there a couple of times. So I kind of knew the space a bit and I'd been at the club a couple things and been at gigs in there. But I didn't really know it extensively. I knew the studio theatre but didn't really know the rest of the space. But the National Review basically used every space. And then I remember them opening up downstairs. That might have been the second or third year I did it that we started going downstairs in the basement area and doing stuff down there. There were some right weird spaces even below.. see, the space you go down to now - or did before it shut - and the studio spaces all along the bottom and the basement, there was an odd couple of floors below that. And a big, big Dutch guy who worked in there, I can't remember his name, Chris maybe his name

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was, he was like 'have you ever been down? Come on, I'll show you'. And we went down with this torch, right. And I was quite panicky, I have to say, and it's basically just like the Arches, again, underneath, but with nothing in it, completely dark and these worms all over the floor. It was a quite, quite odd experience. And apparently, there's another couple below that again, he was like 'I think there's five floors'.

SG: I've heard of.. there were students who were, well, at the time who were students at Glasgow School of Art, who either broke in or got permission, and I've heard various different versions of the stories. An this would have been like 1988, 89 and got into those levels, supposedly. Just thinking of the timeline of this.. are you Glasgow local or just from the broad area, because.. were you around for Glasgow 1990?

TS: Yeah, I used to come in, because I was still in Paisley at that point. I wasn't really involved in it. At that point, I have to say it just bands at that point. That's my first experience, sort of live stuff working for a PA company. So I was in a band, and then I started working with a guy that supplied their PA. And that's when [thought] I should maybe do this as a job because I was a chef at the time. And I went and started working for him. And then I went to college to do a theatre thing. And then a job came up with the concert hall and I went and trained there. Then left there for here.

SG: So after that first year, were you like 'I'll do that again'? Or 'it's just a job but I'll do it again'...

TS: I was definitely up for it, I loved it. It was just fascinating. There was a guy, I think in the first year there was a guy doing a thing in a car, who was like showing a movie in a car. Just up where.. where all the junkies hang out in the back of the Arches, up that lane. You had the car, and it was all blacked out. And you then sat in the backseat. And it was a movie on in front, which was a total technical bit of wizardry to get it happen because there was cable running out the building and into his car. And he drove the car up.. I thought was as cool as anything. And he'd made a movie. And there was also another thing that's it's still in my memory.. because there were so many people I remember. I remember Michael Mayhew quite well, because he was artist in residence, I think. And he kind of

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frightened me a bit, actually, I don't mean frightened in a bad way. Just I was more concerned for him. Because he did a few things.. ah, you're close to the edge there. He did one where he ended up nearly with hypothermia because he was covered in ice. And then he would get people to come up with a wee blowtorch and melt parts of the ice so you could see parts of his body. So occasionally we had to go in and just move him out the ice and warm him up. And another one he did that I think was called Doctor's Orders, and it was all about his brother being an alcoholic. And it was just him with about 50 shot glasses, round about. And he would just invite someone to have shot, to have a shot with someone. And he just drank and drank, and ended up in hospital having his stomach pumped and so yeah.. but he was such a lovely guy, such a lovely geezer. But just quite, quite scary. His work was quite scary. There's one thing that sticks in my mind that I don't know if anybody would remember apart from me, because I worked on it. And it was a Russian company called Night Trade and it was basically a bunch of foley artists. And I had never really seen foley artists live before. And Mark was like, 'do you want to do that?', I was like yeah, and he's like, 'you know sound stuff, you'll go in there'. And there was these Russian geezers with mad equipment, loads of things to make noises. And they had a sax player and they showed a movie that some other Russian guy had made about Jesus, with Jesus being gay. It was a fucking brilliant wee animated movie, and they did foley along with it that blew my mind. It was one of the best things I've ever seen. And that was the only time I've ever seen them or heard of them. They sort of just disappeared out of my life. Yeah, they stick in my mind big for some reason.

SG: That's so brilliant. I'm interested in that sense of you working with these artists in a really intense way or [over] a really short window of time. Did the work turn up pretty fully formed or did it feel like people were turning up going 'I know sort of what it should be but now I'm relying on you to make it happen'?

TS: It depends who it was, really. A lot of people would turn up and go 'I know exactly what I want. Here's my spec. I need this. Franco B, for example, knew exactly what he wanted. It was all laid out for you. And he was fairly easy to work with because as long as you had that, you're good to go. Whereas other people would go, 'I think I might need this' or 'I see you have that down there - can we just add this in?' So it really depended on who it was to be honest.

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SG: Was that part of the appeal of working on it?

TS: I think so, there was a kind of DIY thing. I liked that. I mean, people starting off with a show and then by the end of the festival, it was a completely different thing than they'd started with.

SG: Yeah. I think by the time the festival gets to the Arches, it's already really well established. But it's getting even bigger. Did you get a sense of that over the years you were involved?

TS: I did actually, yeah, because there was more spaces getting used them. Bigger names appearing. And yeah, I have to say, you could feel it getting bigger. Mark starting to panic, 'have I got enough staff?' So yeah, definitely, you could feel it growing.

SG: Yeah, that's interesting like that... that [feeling of] panic. I think it's interesting that lots of people talked about the sheer excitement of the festival getting bigger, but also always with a little bit of an edge of going, is it changing?

TS: There was also some crazy stuff that came up in my mind last night as well. There was the guy with an eel. And I was like 'what was the guy with eel again?'

SG: What's the image of the guy with the eel in your head?

TS: He had a big Perspex tank. And he was in the bottom of it. And it was split in two levels. And there were these eels above him, two big eels that Mark had to source from this pet shop in Glasgow, that's what I remember. He eventually got these two big eels. And they were swimming above the guy who was lying. And there was water dripping in, as far as I remember because it lasted ages, lasted hours. It was drip on top of him. And then eventually, it opened. And he was in the tank with the eels for a bit. And that was the end of the show. I don't know if I'm exactly right with that. But it's stuck in my head,

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him lying there with the eels. And then us all waiting, 'when's it going to happen?' as you'd scoot past. [laughter]

SG: Was that your first time seeing durational work?

TS: Yeah, for sure. Which I thought was great as well because you could leave it, go do another job, then come back. 'Are you still ok?'

SG: Because, as I've carried on with this project, there's this sort of [story].. it's both real and a myth Glasgow has this incredible mix of touring stuff coming from all over the UK and all over the world, starting in the 80s and 90s. And then right up until recently, until we stopped doing touring because of the pandemic. Was it.. what's the question that I'm asking? Did you have a sense - once you clued into what was happening at the National Review - that this was part of a bigger pattern? Or was the National Review a standout thing for you?

TS: At that point, it was a standout thing for me, because I didn't know too much about it. To be honest. I was quite in the dark. And I thought.. God, Mark had said to me when I first started, 'just don't expect things'. Everything's quite fluid. And expect the unexpected. I mean, that was the way I dealt with it. Was it easy to roll with it like that? Well, I quite liked that. It was kind of difficult at first because I was kind of used to straight theatre and this is how it works: this is the first act, and this is the interval, this is the second act. Whereas this guy paints himself in white then cuts himself and then he.. sits there for eight hours. [laughter] Yeah, it was a bit of a sea change for me, I have to say, but a good one.

SG: Yeah. It's interesting that we think you're coming literally from the theatre that we're sat in now, and the conventions of theatre, and maybe also the hierarchies of where there is like a director, and maybe there's a playwright - he's probably not on tour - but then there's actors, and then suddenly, maybe you're working with a lot more individual artists rather than groups of people.

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TS: Yeah, there's, there's a lot more of individuals doing the whole performance. And I was like, oh, you do everything? Oh, you're the stage manager, and the actor and.. oh, right.

SG: Does that change your job?

TS: It makes it a bit easier, I think. I mean, because you've only got one person that you're going to get the answers from. So it does make it a bit easier, I think. And a bit more personal, which I quite liked, because you're actually getting to meet the star, if that's the right word, but you're getting to meet the main person in the show. And then work with them quite closely. Whereas if you're doing a theatre show with a lead actor who's quite famous or whatever, you maybe get to say hi backstage or whatever but it doesn't really get any closer than that.

SG: But then you're working at like, literal, figurative, but often really like literal distance from your view..

TS: ..up in the box. Unless you're backstage and occasionally bump into them. It was quite impersonal. Whereas the Review was quite a personal thing.

SG: Where there artists that you ended up either working with year on year, or at least, like saying hello to in following years?

TS: Just a couple. Donna Rutherford. I did quite a hit with her. I did a show with her on the first or second year, can't remember what it was called. But then she got in touch with me afterwards and said, Can I come in here [the G12] and do stuff? And I was like, Yeah, I guess so, I'll put it to the programmers here. And they were up for it. And she came and did 'If I knew then what I know now'. Something like that, a play on those words. And then I did a [show] I think called Kin with her. So I kind of kept in touch with her. And I think we both hit it off because we're both from Glasgow and both seemed.. a little bit of a punk rocker as well. So we had the same sort of vibe.

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SG: So Franko B you mentioned, was that.. because he obviously - well, maybe not obviously - he came to the festival a number times. And I', now trying to try to remember the name of the bleeding piece that maybe you were describing.

TS: It was basically set up..

SG: Like a catwalk?

No, it was set up like a doctor's surgery. There was the wee number thing outside the room and you got a ticket with a number on it. And the queue was fucking all the way... Because it was done in the basement level. And the room was completely white. He was completely white apart from where he had a wee cut.

SG: And he was wearing a [veterinary] dog collar, as well, wasn't he?

TS: I think so. He had this wee Jesus cut thing. And he had a nurse there to keep it continually bleeding. And it was just very white, everything.. he was completely white, the room was completely white. And you had your wee ticket and the number would go, and you would do in. And I never actually knew what happens in the room. So I was saying to him 'what you're doing in there?' These people just come in and they can either talk or they can.. There's no script or nothing? No, they just come in. Okay. And he's like, at the end that given that wee square, a wee muslin square, that he pressed against the cut, and that was their momento from the show. But it was super popular.

SG: You didn't have a chance to jump in, joining the queue?

TS: No, no.

SG: Were you tempted?

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TS: No, no, I don't think so. I find it quite intriguing and I liked that. Because I'd met him and kind of knew him as I'd met him the year before so I was.. I'd maybe find it a bit awkward. So I never.

SG: But it's interesting. It's like that.. in one to one performance, if you already know, the performer or whatever? How does that change the relationship? How does that change the work?

TS: Because Adrian's Garden project in here. I was dying to do it but at the same time I was like 'I know you too well'

SG: Did you work on it?

TS: Oh, yeah.

SG: We should talk about that. Because that's like another thread, which is separate from the National Review, but still sort of tied into this.

TS: It was absolutely great fun.

SG: So he was.. I can't remember his exact job title. He was a research fellow here [at the University of Glasgow] and it was a funded project. I think it was an AHRC thing. And Dee, Dee Heddon, was his mentor. And I think at the end of the project.. What do you remember of working with Adrian on that? Had you worked with him on any other stuff? Did you know his [work]?

TS: Minty [Donald] designed it. Nick, her partner, Nick built it with me and a couple of guys from the sculpture studio. And Peter Brooks - is that his name? - did the lighting design that was beautiful. Seven stations in here. And what a transformation. You came in here [to the theatre] - the seats were all of the way back and you came in up through the lift and into a shed that was built there. You sat there and then you came down this walkway, down to the seven stations. And my favourite bit was the grass because I had cut the grass. [laughter] I'd sit there in the morning before they started showing, and

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Adrian would say 'the grass needs cutting', 'oh alright, I'll get the scissors out'. Because we had actual grass growing on this eight foot square or whatever, yeah. And it was great fun. We'd sit with our feet on the grass and trim it. I'd worked with him on a couple of bits and bobs, but I just knew him from about the department. He was always here and always full of beans.

SG: What was the other stuff? Do you do the Audience with Adrienne stuff? Or was it...?

TS: I think it was actually. It was actually. But it's kind of vague. It seems so long ago.

SG: Yeah, it was. It was a while ago. So you were primarily involved with the National Review for that cluster of years When it was at the Arches

TS: Basically because I knew Mark and Paul.

SG: Okay, so that was your route in.

TS: I think.. I don't think Mark did it after the Arches either. And I think that's why I sort of fell off the radar as well. Because they got a different production manager then he brought his own sort of casual staff.

SG: And then it was moving around city but went to Tramway. Were you tempted to go along as a punter? Or was that just not on your radar?

TS: I was, I was actually, but it was just one of those things. It was so busy in here at the time, the only time I got off here, I was like 'I'm not going to a theatre. This is busman's holiday. I'm gonna go and see a gig. I mean, I'm not going to a theatre show'

SG: Yeah. I never saw so little comedy as when I worked in comedy. [laughter]

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TS: Exactly, it was that exact feeling, Steve, to be honest. I'd try to avoid it, if I could, I would go if I had to to meet people to get work, a lot of times. Yeah, so go see a show as I know, I've got to meet this guy about another job or whatever. But I hardly ever went to see a show for pleasure. Very rarely.

SG: So after that, after that time. I mean, you mentioned working with Donna - were there other relationships, whether it was like working with them, or whether it was friendships that came out of that period?

TS: Basically just with the people that I worked with, the techs I worked with. Nick Smith. Paul Murphy. There was another Australian guy. Nick? But everyone was really lovely. I mean, it was a really nice team. So see, occasionally, I mean, you bump into people and go, 'God, you work in here now?' Or you go on tour somewhere, [and] somebody's there that you know, from that time. Because it was quite big team, maybe eight or nine of us, because there was so many shows in the Arches, with quite a big fit-up time as well. I think we had a week run-in before the first show. So we had a week to talk with the Arches and try and prep as much as you could for all these million shows coming in. So obviously, you'd have things already flown for a show that's going to happen at some point so they're not arriving and you're trying to do it at the time. It was busy but in a good way. And I loved the fact that.. because I had no kids at that point, we could do 12 hours in the Arches and then just hang about for the club. And then, you know, 'who's doing the 10 'o'clock show in the morning, with the girl cutting herself?' It was usually me, actually. Because there was one show I remember as well.. Kira O'Reilly, is that right? It was a Saturday morning, I'd been at the club the night before, the Friday. Done 12 hours and then the club, went home at about three in morning and had to be in at nine to set up Kira's show that started at ten. It was rough, you know what I mean? And it was quite an easy show to set up, it was just her and a chair and.. It was just a chair really, there had to be a couple of big white lights on her. And there was had nothing for me to do but Mark was like 'you need to be there because she cuts herself and just in case anything happens, I'd like you to be there and just report to me if anything goes wrong'. And I was like 'no worries'. And it was absolutely heaving. It was packed at that time in the morning. I mean, I was like fuck it, I wasn't expecting anyone to be here. And it was in the very end arch next to Midland Street. Midland Street is the one under the bridge?

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SG: Yeah.

TS: And it was all going fine and she came out, and she did the thing with the tape, made herself a matrix almost, which took ages, took hours. And then she started cutting herself and at that point, I just heard this big thud. And this massive guy had just collapsed and fainted when he'd seen the blood. 'You're at the wrong show' [laughter] So he fainted. I had to get him help and the Arches staff came in to try to revive him a bit. And I just remember going back to my desk thinking, oh, that's the first time I've had to do that. That was quite amazing. And then, it was just people's... I found it quite fascinating that people stood there for like, three, four hours and just watched this. I was trying to work out all the way through the show, I wonder if something else is going to happen? And wondering if everyone else is thinking 'is something else going to happen?' [laughter]

SG: Because I've only ever encountered that work through... I've seen video of it and I've seen photographs.. and beautiful photographs of it. And from what I can make out, it's a really slow and deliberate and controlled bit of performance.

TS: It's one of those things. I don't really like the bloodletting thing but I think that that one really caught me. I don't know whether it was because I was there for the whole time. A lot of the other ones, I'd just see a wee bit of it or I'd hear about it from someone else and then see the aftermath of it. But it was because I was there for the whole thing. It was quite, quite entrancing. I was quite taken. But I don't know why.

SG: I had a conversation with someone - and I can't remember who - a few weeks ago, who talked about a big part of the experience for them at the festival was seeing work but then in the queues or in the bar, hearing about the work they've missed.

TS: It's so true as well. Because a lot of things I missed [was] because we all had wee shows to work on. And because a lot of them were durational, you go 'I'll do that for that part, and then move along and

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I'll set this one up and I'll work this one through to its end and now I have to go and do that one...', you know, and then go back and check on the durational one. So there was so much a myth. I mean, occasionally you would go passed and just see something, and think that looks quite interesting. So there was a Chinese girl at one point.. she did this big.. It was almost like crochet but it was fucking massive, in the whole arch, and it was beautiful, one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. And she took hours and hours and hours to do it, so you'd just go past and see it getting bigger, I can see what it is now, it's beautiful. So it's loads of things like that. And all of the fishtail thing that always sticks in my mind.. because it was so smelly. It was just this girl who made this dress with the big trains - it was fucking beautiful.

SG: I could look it up. I know the artists because she was.. I think she was at Glasgow School of Art. And then went across and did.. there was a thing called Bodyparts which was over in Edinburgh, which was sort of a short-lived live art festival over there. And I think she thinks she did both festivals one year. So presumably fresh fish..

TS: I remember that arriving as well, these two big crates, I mean, fork-liftable crates so we couldn't actually carry it and had to get the forklift out and then.. 'woah it stinks, what's in there?' And Mark was like, I've not told anyone. So we needed to open them - and we opened them up.. and it was these crates full with, it must have been thousands of salmon skins. So it was beautiful., it looked absolutely beautiful because they took the light amazingly, I mean, we had big film lights on her so it was pure glistening, it was beautiful. But absolutely stunk the place out for days afterwards.

SG: Was there a lot of that? I mean, we've hit eels and we've hit salmon skin so maybe it's not all like sea life-related... [laughter] but was there a lot of Mark being like..

TS: Yeah, tonnes of that. 'I've got this wee gig for you', he'd say, 'I've got this wee show for you, it's dead easy man, there's not a lot to it, not a lot happens'. And you'd come out afterwards going 'fuck's sake, man!' [laughter] 'You'd not told me about that bit!' I think that was more enjoyable that way, because you never knew what was coming. And I quite like that.

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SG: I was going ask about your sense of the.. maybe it's a funny question. I don't know if you'd.. what was like the crowd like? What were the folks like who turned out for it?

TS: At first I thought, oh, this is strange theatre audience. It was quite punk rock, as I say, quite a lot of arty people and quite a lot of.. more artists than theatre goers. And they were really engaged, which I quite liked. Much more engaged than a normal theatre audience and not really as critical if you know, I mean. They would take it, as you say, would take it away and then maybe discuss at the bar I think, rather than.. People at theatre stuff will discuss it while still in the theatre and on the way out, so you always got a sense of what the audience's reaction was before you'd left the house. Whereas in there, the people were quite.. they didn't say much about it until they were in the bar later. Yeah, I think I a lot of that was to do with people going 'what the fuck was that about?' [laughter] 'What was that actually about? I think I liked it'.

SG: I listened to a thing [from the NRLA archive] when I was down in Bristol, a discussion where people were talking about [whether] the festival [was] a generous place for people to present work and for people to talk about work.

TS: I would say so, I think so. Well, I definitely felt that. I felt that [it] felt like a bit of a movement, like a movement of people rather than an audience. Because everybody was there... there was maybe some people there for the shock value. I don't think that many were. Because at first I thought that's what the audience would be, just people going there because somebody's cut themselves, people hanging themselves from something, or whatever. But it wasn't. I mean, it was really appreciated for [what it was].

SG: Did it feel like a Scottish audience? Or more [international]?

TS: Sometimes. Again, I think it depended on the artist there. Sometimes it felt quite International. But it was kind of hard to gauge.

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SG: Maybe it was an unfair question to ask. Part of what's in my head is that I'm thinking about [is how] Mayfest - all through this period - has this mix of really brilliant, but very broad and popular stuff. And then we'll have the best international ballet company from somewhere. And then the middle, there'll be Goat Island, doing gorgeous stuff, but a totally different register of expression, like not a 7:84 play and not an opera.

TS: Yeah, well, that's, that's fair.

SG: And in all of that I've been trying to work out.. maybe it's a mistake to imagine there is like 'an audience'. It's always just lots of different people. But just that landscape of going... Glasgow has been the kind of city for one reason or another which has gone 'right, I'm gonna programme these things back to back'.

TS: Do you know else I've got to mention as well. It's Ian Smith, who was fantastic. So I mean, to work with. It's funny, I continued with Ian Smith stuff throughout my life, too. I mean, I kept bumping into him. And I shared a flat at the time with a guy that did a night at the Arches with Ian. And then I met his son Stanley when he came. And I met him at Dancespace when I worked there for a bit. And he was a fantastic MC. So I mean, because you could really get the audience [going]. You know, you could feel the buzz in the room. As soon as he introduced something, you're like, 'woah',

SG: So what was his job? What would you remember him actually doing in the room?

TS: Pretty much MC. Yeah

SG 33:01

So saying when stuff is happening,, calling people in, directing people..

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TS: 'Here we're going to see a show about..' and just lead these people. It was almost like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. [laughter] And all these people were just wander behind him and go and see this [work]. And he was really good at that, I think. And I think a lot of that was taking people from durational pieces - 'Here, come and see this piece, it'll last 10 minutes or whatever, then you can go back...'. So yeah, his job was unique, but he was fucking brilliant at, I have to say.

SG: And then you say you worked with him on his other stuff, with his company?

TS: Yeah, with Mischief [La Bas]. Because a couple of my flatmates were in Mischief, so I got to know him quite well and then I met him at Dancebase when he did a few MC things there, the same sort of idea. And then his son Stanley was here was was just incredible. I remember meeting Stan and going, oh, your dad's Ian?

SG: So what the Mischief La Bas work like? Did it feel like it was part of that NRLA world or was it like an offshoot?

TS: Oh definitely. Cleaning Elvises were my favourites, I think. Do you remember the Cleaning Elvises? Fantastic. Cleaning the streets, man. [laughter] That was awesome. And then I remember.. they did a thing in the east end of Glasgow at Tolcross Park and they were dressed up in sort of big emu-type costumes, as I far as I remember. And all the kids from there were like 'what the fuck is this?' And sort of attacked them, so there were this big emus running away from these kids. [laughter] I loved their stuff. And I remember them at the river festival as well being like posh sailor, Captain guys. Those people at the river festival taking boating things really seriously did come up. [mimes sucking on pipe] 'Hello!' [laughter]

SG: I always think there's a sort of.. there's a little bit of a street theatre tradition that they're working in - if I'm doing my theatre scholar thing - but then there's this anarchic thing, and this punk thing and this was much more of [the] personality [of their work at that time].

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TS: I loved them. They were one of my favourites. I think it was just because I knew a lot of people in [Mischief] and I knew what they were about, I knew exactly what they were about. And they paid people well. Same with the National Review as well, it's one of the first things I did it for. 'Oh, how much? Yeah. Okay. That's not a bad wage. 'But it's long hours'. And it was long hours but you just took like two or three weeks out of your life and come out of it with money, you know what I mean? Because there was nothing to spend it on really apart from the club afterwards and that didn't happen every night because it was too tiring. But it was worth doing financially, I have to say.

SG: So it felt like a good deal.

TS: Which was I always quite happy for, I have to say. I mean, it wasn't the main reason I'd done it afterwards. Yeah, that didn't really come into it afterwards. I would have done it for less.

SG: The last year [of the NRLA] by design was 2010, which was when it was back at the Arches again. And it's been replaced by other things like well, I don't know if replaced is the word but other things have grown up in its space like BUZZCUT and things like Take Me Somewhere. Right? Is that work still on your radar? Do you ever get a chance to see stuff?

TS: I do, as much as I can. At BUZZCUT especially because they give our students, for example, they give them a platform, which is great. Because it's really tough these days, I would say, because there's not a lot of opportunities for.. I wouldn't say avant garde, I wouldn't say that, it's just not your normal run of the mill work. So I mean, it's basically solo work. So yeah, I do, as much as much as we can. And that is something that I would go and see for pleasure because it is students that I know and it's good to support them after.