



Witchcraft

Cast

Professional Actors

Alison Darcy
Vincent Leclerc
Chimwemwe Miller

Student Actors

Alexandra Draghici (BFA, Theatre)
Alessandra Ferreri (BA, English/CW)
Michael Hughes (BFA, Theatre)
Elizabeth Langley (independent student, English and former Chair of Dance)
Lindsay Wilson (recent graduate MA English/CW)

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The project was developed through Hexagram-Concordia Institute for research/creation in Media Arts and Technology and with the continuous support of matralab, a research-creation center associated with the Canada Research Chair in Inter-X Arts.

The project is also supported by the Department of Theatre at Concordia and the PhD in Humanities at Concordia.

The Plays

1) “Women on the Moor”

Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft*, act I, sc. 3
Directed by Cristina Iovita

2) *Children at Play / Blood / Flight*

Resonant response to “Women on the Moor”
Written and Directed by Louis Patrick Leroux

3) “Fishing for Information”

Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft*, act II, scenes 2-3
Directed by Cristina Iovita

4) *Blind*

Resonant response to “Fishing for Information”
Written by Lindsay Wilson
Directed by Alison Darcy

5) “The Reach of the Law”

Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft*, act IV, sc. 1, & act V, sc. 1-2.
Directed by Louis Patrick Leroux

6) *The Finger Play of Katharine Nipsy (or Bundles)*

Resonant response to “The Reach of the Law”
Written by Joanna Donehower
Directed by Cristina Iovita

Joanna Baillie (1762 - 1851)

Joanna Baillie was a successful playwright during her lifetime, certainly in terms of her cultural importance and the reputation of her plays, if not for their success on the stage. She wrote 27 plays, and her *De Monfort* was performed in 1800 and 1821 at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane by the leading actors of the day. Her 1836 gothic drama *Witchcraft: A Tragedy* revisits the history of witchcraft trials in her homeland, Scotland, through a conventicle of destitute female characters seeking power, love, and retribution in an elusive and illusory dark devil. Baillie explores mass hysteria and paranoia in witches and their accusers, in women and men, and examines how individuals struggle to navigate and negotiate in a culture of fear.

The Project

This three year FQRSC-funded research-creation project allows us to explore a “forgotten” Romantic play while channelling our own creative responses to the source material. Baillie is not our contemporary. Her sensibility is very much of another era; so are her theatrical conventions. Yet *Witchcraft*, through its hyperbolic illustration of fear before the unknown, is a play in which we recognize typical human response.

The original Baillie scenes we are presenting have been substantially edited, yet their essence remains. Our own contemporary readings into her work are wide-ranging in style. Each response was created to react to, or engage in a dialogue with the Baillie scene it echoes. A short trilogy of pieces (*Children/Blood/Flight*) plays up the titillation of eroticised fear, and each piece becomes a response to the previous one. *Blind* takes place in Africa, where the quest for *muti* replaces the Scottish witchcraft convention. *Katherine Nipsy* exploits the terrible motifs one can find in storytelling, especially when it is infused with grotesque, devilish tales.

The project is multi-faceted in that there are Romantic scholars examining various aspects of the Baillie text and performance context, there is a creative team actively engaging with the play and challenging it through performance and responsive works, and, eventually, all of this will coexist in on a hypertext-based platform (CD-ROM, Web, or electronic publication). The result will be a truly hybrid example of scholarly research, creative response and challenge to the original text and research, and further dialectical engagement between the research and creative elements. What you are seeing is a snapshot into the process at the end of the first year.

Designers and Crew

Artistic Director and Principal Investigator of the project:

Dr. Louis Patrick Leroux (English & Études françaises)

Playwrights: Joanna Baillie, Joanna Donehower, Louis Patrick Leroux, Lindsay Wilson

Directors: Alison Darcy, Cristina Iovita (PhD, Humanities), Louis Patrick Leroux

Assistant to the Artistic Director, Head Dramaturg and Production Manager: Joanna Donehower (MA, English/Creative Writing)

Stage Manager and Puppetry: Hayley Lewis (BFA, Theatre)

Back Stage Manager: Christine Leclerc (BA, English/CW)

Production Dramaturgs and Assistant Back Stage Managers:

Alessandra Ferreri (BA, English/CW), Nina Jane Drystek (BA, English/CW)

Set, Costumes, and Props: Isabelle Duguay (MFA, Arts Education) Julie Chamberland

Make-up, Hair and Costumes: Deborah Sullivan (BFA, Concordia)

Videographer and Film Editor: Abdelhamid Bouchnak (MA, Film, U. De Montréal)

Video effects, Specials edits, Computer graphics: Jeremy Eliosoff

Video Projection and Tech Consultant: Michal Seta (matralab-Concordia)

Video Operator: Peter Lee

Lighting Design: Mathieu Marcil

Lighting Board Operator: Lucy Satzewich (BA, English McGill)

Sound Design: Chimwemwe Miller with Julian Menezes (MA, McGill)

Set and Construction Team: Hannah Sutherland (BFA Art History) Philip Greene (BSC Geology McGill)

Production Intern: Aaron Janke (BFA Theatre)

Program Cover Image: Noémi Poulin

Playwrights Notes

Children at Play/Blood/Age

What first struck me when I read Baillie's original scene was these women playing at being afraid, and men playing at being bad, *nasty bad*. Actual women might have driven themselves into a Bacchanal frenzy; but these seemed more like girls flirting from afar with both Eros and Thanatos. The response grew into three connected pieces. *Children at Play* is story-telling driven theatre featuring kids doing what they do best: playing. *Blood* grew out of my desire to explore a French-Canadian Catholic angle on Baillie's Scottish Protestant reading of witchcraft. The adolescent hysterics provoking stigmata seemed like an appropriate follow-up to the early exploration of childhood fears. *Blood* became, in reality, a resonant response to *Children at Play*, except this time, the media explored would be video performance. I wrote dialogue which I then cut less than a week ago to replace them with the *Ave Verum Corpus*, the only words that seem appropriate. The last piece, *Flight* (known in rehearsals as *Age*) is a physical piece; a dance piece. I am not a choreographer. I am very much a word-based playwright and director. This piece started out as a literary description of a movement piece. Then I asked the dancers to stop referring to the text and rather work from what traces remained of it. Why a dance piece? Because of theatre and video being the media explored in the previous two. Because we had a dancer of considerable experience in the team. Because of the sense of risk in exploring a new genre. Because *Blood* needed a response to reinvest the stage, to highlight the performing body. *Flight* would be the way to reconnect with Baillie's women and perhaps drive away the horned, masquerading devil once and for all.

-Louis Patrick Leroux

Blind

Blind is our response to the ritual killings (*muti* killings) of in parts of South Africa and Tanzania. In some of these places schools exist to shelter albino children from the prejudice and physical threat they face from some members of their society who hold the belief that their body parts hold magical properties. Blind children also attend these

schools because they cannot see; because they cannot see, they cannot judge or be afraid. I was taken with one picture in particular of a blind boy in one of these classrooms: what would this world be like from the perspective of a blind child? Shortly after, I came across a documentary about a Tanzanian albino woman who was viciously mutilated by her neighbour for her body parts while her children slept in the room next to her. These two stories stayed with me and I wanted to know: does superstition blind us? The song you hear us singing is called *Indaba Lahl'Umlenze*. In rehearsal we chose this song because of its underlying message: "Who says we can't dance?" For us it was a powerful song to give the children in this play to sing. They are on the margins of their society but they can still ask: Who says we can't dance?

-Lindsay Wilson

Glossary

Sangoma: a practitioner of herbal medicine, divination and counselling in societies of Southern Africa.

Ukuqiniswa: to be immunized.

Impepho: a sacred plant, burned in belief that by breathing in its smoke it will help people communicate with their ancestors.

The Finger Play of Katherine Nipsy (or Bundles)

MUMMY: A fox sounds like a child being murdered, isn't that right Mummy?

SPINSTER: That's right.

GIRL: No it was a child, a boy. Crying, calling out –

The Landlord is coming tonight. It's the first of the month and he's been coming the first of the month for some thirty years now. The Spinster, Mummy, and little Katharine Nipsy have been saving up to pay, but the rent is something more precious than money. *The Finger Play of Katharine Nipsy* channels the mass hysteria of the last act of Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft* and brings the reach of English Law into the Scottish home. Or is it the Irish home? No, the Canadian home. Or all three. Or maybe none of these.

-Joanna Donehower

A Glossary of Select Scottish Terms

cantrup: actually *cantrip*; a spell or charm of necromancy or witchcraft; a witch's trick or mischievous device. Also *jocosely*, any playfully mischievous trick; any whimsically mad, eccentric, or extravagant piece of conduct

chattels: property; goods; money

dominie: a schoolmaster, pedagogue. (Now chiefly *Sc.*)

jocteleg: a clasp-knife

ken: to make a thing known to one; to teach one something. *Obs.* *trans.*; to recognize (at sight, or by some marks or tokens); to identify. now *north.* or *Sc.*

kittle: ticklish; difficult to deal with, requiring great caution or skill; unsafe to meddle with; as to which one may easily go wrong or come to grief; risky, precarious, 'nice', delicate.

lug: ear, now *colloq.* or *joc.*; by the 19th cent. it had become the only word in use in *Sc.* *ear* having become *obs.* exc. in combination (though it is now standard)

meed: in early use: something given in return for labour or service; wages, hire; recompense, reward, deserts; a gift. later: a reward or prize given for excellence or achievement; a person's deserved share *of* (praise, honour, etc.). Now *literary* and *arch.*; *Sc.* aid, assistance, help, support. *Obs.*