



BLOOD RED ROSES

[or the way you make me feel]

Μια παραγωγή των 'The Ice Cream Van'

Blood Red Roses explores the evolution of dictatorships. It shares a collection of dark and funny short stories, reflecting the present day, and us within it. Whilst we witness the unquestionable resurgence of political fascism in the world, could it be that we are already part of a new kind of dictatorship...and we just love it too much to notice?

"A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses (...) control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude." Aldous Huxley

Residency Dates: 29th November - 20th December 2018

Performance Dates: 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th December 2018

Rehearsal and performance space: Old Vinegar Factory, Limassol, Cyprus

Research for this project began in January 2018. The work was created in November and December 2018.

The overarching purpose of this project was to provide essential professional development for the artists involved, strengthen a pre-existing international collaboration, develop an immersive and participatory performance which challenged Cypriot audiences.

Over the course of 2018, myself and two other collaborators, all living in different countries connected to develop ideas, plan and research *Blood Red Roses*. We used social media platforms, including Facebook to stay connected. Our interaction with these platforms informed the performance piece irrevocably; we began to notice the targeted advertising linked to our conversations, the email notifications reminding us to log in; the bizarre friend suggestions; and the data harvesting adverts subtly relieving us of our personal information. We became fascinated in the new kind of dictatorship we felt we found ourselves in, a seductive dictatorship, masquerading as social media, digital productivity and global connectivity. The experience of our digital collaboration became central to the performance content.

Towards the end of 2018 we spent 3 weeks physically working together in a space, to devise the final performance. After 10 months of digital interaction, it was a relief to simply be together, for our bodies to move, feel and explore together. What became an interesting and unexpected challenge, was how to express physically, the alienating and at times terrifying interactions we experienced on the digital plane, when our bodies were immobile, and our voices digitised. However the dedicated time and space afforded by this residency gave us the resource we needed to experiment, explore and test effectively - a rare luxury. It also allowed us to invite industry professionals into the process to provide crucial insight and feedback.

The result was an immersive, participatory performance bringing to life prevalent themes of power, corporatocracy, control and complicity. These were explored and characterised through, episodic interweaving narratives performed in both English, Cypriot and a spattering of French!



The residency resulted in four performances of *Blood Red Roses*, each 55 minutes in duration, with a maximum capacity of 25 people per performance. In total 90 people attended the performance, so we reached 90% capacity for our 4 performances. We held informal post show discussions after each of the performances, to disseminate thinking and to allow our audiences to connect more fully with the themes of the piece. These were attended by 40 people in total. We shared our experience widely on social networks, and were interviewed for local and national press.

The audience feedback was overwhelming positive. Many people talked about how it “encourages me to be more cautious with my online activity”, “shifted my perceptions of platforms like Facebook” and caused them to “think more carefully about how my data is being used”. Many spoke of being moved, and seeing themselves reflected in the work. Audiences members also noted that the performance style was unusual for what they normally see in Cyprus, that is was “good to see something different and challenging”. However, some audience members found the episodic, non linear style of the performance difficult to follow, whilst others found the political critique controversial.

The impact of the residency, both personally and professionally was amplified by the local connections made prior to the residency. These connections provided us with willing participants to test and develop our ideas, and crucial insight into a new audience. These local relationships increased the richness of the experience and proved invaluable. These links also inevitably helped with audience development; local endorsements encouraging more people to watch the performance, despite being performed in three languages!

As an artist and producer based in the UK, it was incredibly interesting spending an extended period of time working abroad. I was able to experience local live performances, attend art galleries and meet local artists, including Cypriot based Directors, Choreographers, Designers and Performers. I have learned a great deal about the cultural and funding landscape. This inevitably improved the quality of the work we produced. Cyprus is also a very interesting area to deliver political work, due to current political tensions, particularly participatory performance work, something not commonly seen in Cyprus. This landscape made the content impactful and potentially more potent for local audiences. As a collective this residency supported us to develop our working practices and consolidate our artistic interests. We are now geared towards a more participatory approach to developing work, and are curious to test these approaches on other audiences. We look to future funding opportunities in 2019 to enable us to take this work and our working relationship further.

