

Wattle & Daub.  
Figure Theatre

# TRIPTYCH

Three stories about love, loss  
and letting go



*"beautiful, tender and strangely poignant"*

Kate Yedigaroff, Mayfest Co-producer

## Information Pack

Triptych	1, 2	Example Press Release	4
Target Audience	3	About the Company, Collaborator Biographies	5
History and Development	3	Technical Info	6
Example Programme Copy	3	Contact	6

## Triptych

*Triptych* presents three separate yet interconnected stories about love, loss and the process of letting go. Using multiple puppetry styles—rod and direct-manipulation, small scale and over-life-size, and traditional rod and overhead projector shadow puppetry—*Triptych* continually creates a fresh sense of wonder as the company breathes life into different and unexpected objects.

As the show moves from story to story, themes and images are repeated, gaining new and deeper meanings: a flower is no longer simply a flower, but a reminder of heartbreak; a feather becomes a vehicle for escape; birds and butterflies lead their followers to tragedy. *Triptych* offers its audience the continual excitement of the new combined with the familiarity of a single overarching magical world, at once whimsical and haunting.

### I: Norkus

Norkus is a simple and tragic clown figure who finds beauty in the simplest of objects. A magical exploration of dreams and heartache, *Norkus* invites the audience into a world in which flowers bloom and break, a mask reveals a stranger lurking within, and feathers offer the elusive and dangerous promise of flight. Funny and poignant, *Norkus* explores themes of innocence, wonder, loss, grief, and ultimately hope.

A combination of rod and direct-manipulation puppetry, *Norkus* blurs the line between puppet and puppeteer. Here there is no separation between the two, and no attempt to hide the mechanics of his puppetry, as his head is attached to the puppeteer's head, and his hands are her hands.



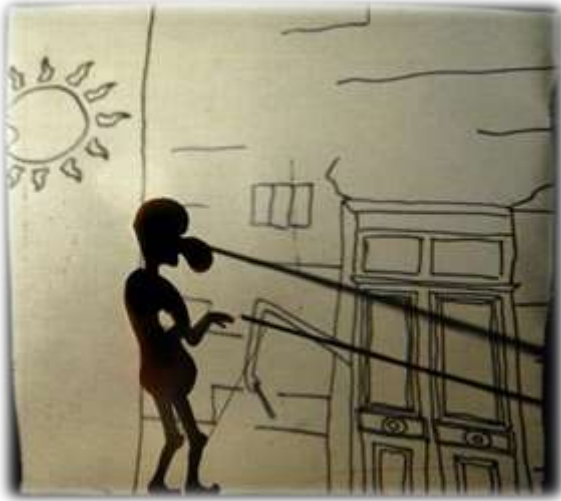
### II: The Old Wife's Tale

Created in collaboration with TS Eliot award-winning poet and novelist Philip Gross, and with sound design by noise-poet Chris Roaf, *The Old Wife's Tale* uses recorded narration, ambient soundscapes and a combination of masks, small scale and over-life-size puppetry to tell a story through shifting viewpoints and dreamlike imagery. An original fable, the piece tells the story of a witch within a tree in the heart of the forest who demands one life for every group of creatures that passes through. Flies, birds and cats submit, but when humans come to the forest they are unable to abide by her rule, creating a larger and more terrible tragedy. *The Old Wife's Tale* presents us with the futility and danger of human arrogance in the face of natural forces, asking us to examine our place within the natural world, and to question our assumptions about cruelty and necessity.

The constantly shifting sense of scale allows the audience to see the world from the point of view of an all-powerful predator one moment, and its terrified prey the next, while eerie metallic soundscapes and darkly compelling narration complete a profoundly unsettling atmosphere.



### III: The Oldest Man in the World



Shadow puppetry and a swinging original jazz score tell the story of the oldest man and the oldest woman in the world who meet in a Parisian jazz club for one last dance. The piece brings together an unlikely pair of theatrical forms—shadow puppetry and the musical—to explore the process of ageing, disintegration, and what it means to let go. While asking these larger questions, this is a piece that can also be enjoyed simply as a touching love story with a sizzling soundtrack and delightful, quirky characters. Visually, *The Oldest Man in the World* explores the intersections of the grotesque and the loveable, the surreal and the homely, the intimate and the grandiose.

The piece features an original score by pianist and composer Tom Poster—founding member of the renowned Aronowitz Ensemble—and a 4 piece jazz combo, and draws on Chinese horizontal-rod shadow puppetry to juxtapose the grandiosity and immediacy of the musical theatre form with the intimacy and subtlety of shadow puppetry. The whimsical humour and exuberant jazz score contrast with the sombre mood of the previous story, bringing the audience full circle to the bittersweet tone that marked the beginning of *Triptych*.



## Target Audience

Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre's aim is to broaden the appeal of puppet theatre for adults. With a highly visual style incorporating delicate physicality, innovative storytelling and a broad palette of music, mask and puppetry techniques, *Triptych* will attract those interested in puppetry, contemporary visual and physical theatre, and storytelling, as well as providing an accessible entry-point to these forms.

The show is suitable for ages 12+, and will particularly appeal to those who enjoy the work of Green Ginger, Pickled Image, Faulty Optic and Bread and Puppet.

*Really captivating, well worth seeing. Puppetry in so many forms, unique, comical, dramatic, simple—so much there.*

*I usually dislike theatre but enjoyed this and time flew.*

*A gentle, simple little gem that seemed to say something about loneliness and greed, getting old and love. Very strong, tender work.*

### Audience Responses from Bristol Ferment

## History and Development

*Triptych* has been developed through work-in-progress showings at Prototype at the Tobacco Factory and Bristol Ferment at the Bristol Old Vic. Individual stories from *Triptych* have been performed at In The Flesh '08 at the Barbican Theatre Plymouth, Mayfest '09 at the Bristol Old Vic and as part of the first ever Bristol Festival of Puppetry.

*Triptych* has been shown in full at Bristol Old Vic, Mayfest '10 and Little Angel Theatre, and will be showing at Bristol Festival of Puppetry '11 and Suspense London Puppetry Festival '11.

## Example Programme Copy

Three stories about love, loss and letting go. A small, lonely figure is lured by the elusive and dangerous promise of flight; a witch within the heart of a tree demands a Faustian bargain for safe passage through her forest; and the oldest man in the world stumbles into a Paris jazz club just in time to share one last dance.

Created in collaboration with T S Eliot award-winning poet Philip Gross and with an original score featuring a 4-piece jazz combo, *Triptych* fuses innovative storytelling with a distinctive combination of visual theatre, puppetry and masks. Magical, lively and somewhat dark.

# TRIPTYCH

**‘beautiful, tender and strangely poignant’** *Kate Yedigiaroff, Mayfest Co-producer*

In a world in which a handful of feathers hold the secret of flight, a witch within the heart of a tree demands a Faustian bargain for safe passage through her forest, and the oldest man in the world dances eternally to the swinging jazz of the bizarre egg-baby, you’re never quite sure whether to be amused or frightened.

*Triptych*, the debut show from innovative new company Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre, is full of such contradictions. Created in collaboration with TS Eliot award-winning poet Philip Gross and with an original score featuring a 4-piece jazz combo, *Triptych* uses a mixture of visual theatre, shadows and puppetry to tell three stories which strike a balance between the grotesque and the loveable, the tragic and the hilarious, the familiar and the downright weird.

‘We wanted to create a three-part show around the idea of letting go: How do you let go of something you love?’ says puppeteer Tobi Poster. ‘Whether that be another person, your youth or even your life. I suppose in a way it’s a piece about the different kinds of loss we experience as we go through life, which sounds rather dark, but then again it’s also a shadow-puppet-musical about how much I love 1950s jazz!’ he adds. ‘Of course, it’s also a kind of skewed fairy tale, and a clown-show about trying to fly—one of the wonderful things about an anthology piece is that you can look at the same idea in all sorts of different ways.’

If you think you know what you’re in for at a puppet show, think again. Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre explodes ideas about what puppetry can do, blurring the line between puppet and live performer, mixing genres with gleeful abandon, and proving that puppetry can be for adults too.

A truly trans-Atlantic duo, the company met in Paris while studying mask and clowning with Philippe Gaulier, whose former students include Sasha Baron-Cohen and Complicite’s Simon McBurney. Tobi fell in love with puppetry while working with award-winning clown and physical theatre company Lost Spectacles, notably on their recent hit *Lost in the Wind*. Artistic Director Laura Purcell Gates cut her teeth performing in US burlesque troupe Stilettoes and Straps, and honed her puppetry skills in numerous cabaret and street performances across the US and UK. ‘I love the atmosphere you get performing in cabaret venues,’ she says. ‘I’m really interested in how you can create that intimacy with the audience in a theatre space.’

And the company’s name? ‘We like to play with simple forms in order to explore complex ideas and emotions,’ says Tobi. ‘We’re very low-tech and minimalist in a way; I like the idea that you can build something quite intricate and beautiful out of some scraps of cloth and a bundle of twigs. At the end of the day, we’re just looking for the best possible way to tell the story.’

## About the Company

Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre is a Bristol-based puppetry and visual theatre company. We play with strange structures, striking imagery and the interconnections of puppet and puppeteer. Through exploring the ways in which humans bring life to puppets, masks and other performing objects, we are committed to creating theatre that audiences find magical, inspirational and transformative.

**Tobi Poster** trained at Bretton Hall and the École Philippe Gaulier and has also studied clown with Mick Barnfather and Butoh with Tetsuro Fukuhara. Aside from his work in Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre he is co-founder and co-artistic director of Lost Spectacles, appearing in their 2009 production *Lost in the Wind*. He has also recently appeared in Pirandello's *Henry IV* at the Minneapolis Theatre Garage and *In Manus Tuas* at the 2007 Festival of Emergent Arts, London, and has run workshops in physical comedy for the University of Minnesota.

**Laura Purcell Gates** began designing puppets with Michael Sommers of Open Eye in Minneapolis, and has recently relocated to the U.K. where she co-founded Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre. She trained at LAMDA and the École Philippe Gaulier, has directed and performed throughout the U.S. with such companies as Shakespeare and Company, Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company and Jon Ferguson Theater, and was a founding member of Stilettoes and Straps Cabaret.



## Collaborator Biographies

**Philip Gross** is a poet and novelist, writing for both adults and young people. Winner of the prestigious 2009 T S Eliot Prize for his collection *The Water Table*, and previously shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize for *The Wasting Game*, he enjoys collaboration and has worked with other poets and dramatists, as well as with photographers, sculptors and choreographers. [www.philipgross.co.uk](http://www.philipgross.co.uk)

Winner of First Prize at the 2007 Scottish International Piano Competition, **Tom Poster** appears as concerto soloist, solo recitalist and chamber musician in a range of major international venues. He has also recorded his own Gershwin arrangements with jazz singer Victoria Hart and had his compositions performed extensively, including two chamber operas. [www.tomposter.co.uk](http://www.tomposter.co.uk)

**Chris Roaf** learned to play shakuhachi and shamisen in Japan while studying Japanese, and has performed with the SOAS Japanese Music Society throughout the UK. In 2009 he composed and recorded the soundtrack for Sam Branton's *Erotica Bestia* exhibition at the Sesame Gallery. He both modifies and creates his own instruments, a number of which were made specifically for *Triptych*.

## Technical Information

Requirements:

- Minimum stage dimensions: 5mW x 4mD
- Basic house lighting rig
- CD player and amplified sound

Running time: 1 hour with no interval



## Contact

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