

Arts House Company in Residence

Hoke's Bluff Action Hero

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Image: Action Hero

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Wed 24 – Sat 27 May
7:30pm
80 mins

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artshouse.com.au

**Co-Artistic Director,
Writer & Performer:**
Gemma Paintin
**Co-Artistic Director,
Writer & Performer:**
James Stenhouse
Lighting Designer:
Jo Palmer
Dramaturg:
Deborah Pearson
Devisor & Performer:
Laura Dannequin
Additional Text:
Nick Walker
Producer:
Mel Scaffold
Producers:
China Plate

Image: Paul Blakemore



Hoke's Bluff is part of our ongoing investigations into Americana, taking its place alongside earlier works like *A Western* and *Watch Me Fall* as a means of interrogating what it means to be so influenced and seduced by cultural narratives from a continent 4000 miles away. As part of the process for *Hoke's Bluff*, we travelled several times to North America and watched American football in Oakland, ice hockey in Vancouver and basketball in San Antonio. We immersed ourselves in hours and hours of straight-to-DVD underdog sports films and teen movies set in small town America. Gradually, we fell for this hopelessly sentimental world and found ourselves genuinely moved by it.

Instead of approaching the material with an ironic sideways glance, we wanted to commit to the schmaltzy idealism and nostalgia with total devotion, asking what happens when we take hope seriously.

In this sense, *Hoke's Bluff* is an exercise in radical sentimentality. It is in angry love with its subject, both a critique and a love letter to America and the stories it tells itself. It gently reveals the ambient violence that hides within the seemingly innocuous cornball stories whilst unashamedly reveling in the beauty of their banality. With meticulous attention to the aesthetics and languages of these superficial landscapes, *Hoke's Bluff* simulates the simulations with immaculate authenticity, but its unforgiving liveness leaves gaps and breathing spaces where the jump-cuts and relentlessly edited montage sequences would usually lie.

By throwing ourselves wholeheartedly into the task with idiotic abandon, and by inviting the audience to throw themselves in too, we start to unearth the melancholy that attaches itself to such a futile expenditure of energy and we're invited to reflect on why we're 'all playing the game' and what it means to do 'whatever it takes'.

Gemma Paintin & James Stenhouse

Co-Artistic Directors & Performers

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Gemma Paintin and James Stenhouse live in Bristol, UK, and create interdisciplinary performances together under the name Action Hero. For more than a decade, they have worked almost exclusively with each other, and are committed to creating work together as part of a long form collaborative practice. Together they have toured to more than twenty five countries across 5 continents to critical and popular acclaim.

Their ongoing interests lie in the iconography of popular culture and its use; both as a weapon and as a shared cultural memory, and although their work manifests many different forms, the live experience is at the heart of everything they do.

Gemma & James won an Austin (Texas) Critic's Table Award in 2013; in 2016 they were shortlisted for the Anti Festival International Prize for Live Art for their contribution to the field. A book of six of their works was recently published by Oberon and they are visiting lecturers Central School of Speech and Drama.

Jo Palmer

Lighting Designer

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Jo Palmer is a Freelance Production Manager and Technical Designer for Live performance and events. She has toured both nationally and internationally with numerous companies including Split Britches, Stacy Makishi and Action Hero. She was the Technical Designer for Makishi's 2013 show, *The Falsettos*, as well as Split Britches' *Desperate Archives* at the La Mama ETC Gallery in New York and The Library of Performing Rights at Encuentro 2014 in Montreal. More recently she has designed lighting for Jo Bannon's *Alba* at IBT 2015 in Bristol, Stacy Makishi's *VesperTime* and Project O's *SWAGGA*. She works as a designer for Split Britches on a variety of their work including their latest show, *UXO*. She is currently designing on Le Gateaux Chocolat's *Duckie*, Liz Carr's *Assisted Suicide: The Musical* and *Latitude 36*, for Valletta Capital of Culture 2018.

Deborah Pearson

Dramaturg

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Deborah Pearson is a live artist and playwright. Her work has toured to four continents and fifteen countries, and has been translated into five languages. She recently published *The Future Show* with Oberon books. She is the founding co-director of UK artist collective Forest Fringe. Deborah has won awards for both her solo practice and her work with Forest Fringe, including three herald angels, a Scotsman Fringe First, a Peter Brooke Empty Space Award and the Total Theatre Award for Significant Contribution.

She has a PhD in narrative in contemporary performance from Royal Holloway, where she was a Reid Scholar. Her research was supervised by Dan Rebellato.

She is an associate artist with Volcano in Canada and is a resident artist at Somerset House Studios.

Laura Dannequin

Devisor & Performer

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Laura is French-born performer / choreographer / performance maker living in Bristol, UK. Since 2003, she has danced/performed in choreography/work by: Saburo Teshigawar & Karas, Phillip Zarrilli, Senza Tempo, Lastalaica Productions, Action Hero and between 2007-2010 Daghdha Dance Company under Michael Klien's direction (Eire). She took part in Deborah Hay's Solo Performance Commissioning project out of which the solo work *In The Making* emerged.

In the last 5 years she has developed a practice that encompasses performance, installation and print; works include *Hardy Animal*, a project that encompasses a solo performance, a fine-print bookwork and a lecture performance, which continues to tour in both arts and medical contexts and was one of the Aerowaves Twenty for 2016; *Dance Dark Dance* (2013) and *The Secret Slowness of Movement* (Mayfest 2015/Dance Umbrella 2016). She is a regular and long-term collaborator to Dan Canham and Still House. She also enjoys working as a creative/choreographic consultant for an increasing number of artists.

She is currently training in as a Somatic Movement Educator through the school of Body-Mind Centering, dancing in Roberta Jean's *Brocade* and developing *Making Each Other Possible* (Compass Commission 2017), a new dance work in collaboration with dance artist Stephanie Mc Mann.

Nick Walker

Additional Text

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Nick is a Perrier-nominated writer who works extensively in theatre and radio. He has two published novels on bookshelves worldwide, has written and performed stories, plays and comedy for BBC Radio 4 and toured internationally with some of the nation's finest experimental theatre companies. As founder and staff writer with Talking Birds theatre company, he devised and wrote sell-out show *We Love You City*, and regularly collaborates with the UK's most innovative theatre companies, most recently with NoFit State on their international hit, *Barricade*.

Mel Scaffold

Producer

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Mel Scaffold is CEO of Theatre Bristol, where she helps design and shape new ideas that make large-scale change in the arts, and develops relationships and partnerships that will bring new opportunities to the sector.

She previously worked as Theatre Bristol's Company Producer, giving senior producing support to a number of artists including Action Hero.

Until 2015 she was also Development Facilitator for Create Gloucestershire, an organisation instigating change in the arts sector through collective thinking and working.

Previous incarnations include producing live art and dance at Arnolfini, spoken word at Apples & Snakes and new writing inspired by biomedical science at Theatrescience. She holds an MA in Performance Research and is Chair of Trustees for Firebird Theatre, a company of disabled actors.

China Plate

Producers

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Launched in 2006, China Plate is an independent theatre studio that works with artists, venues, festivals and funders to make original, exciting theatre that plays with form and has narrative at its heart.

The company are also Associate Producers at Warwick Arts Centre where they develop and commission new work, Artistic Associates at the New Wolsey Theatre where they are Directors of PULSE Festival, Programmers of New Directions (the NRTF showcase), producers of innovative development programmes including *The Darkroom*, *The Optimists* (producer training) and *The First Bite* and *Bite Size Festivals* and partners with The Place, The NRTF and Take Art on the Rural Touring Dance Initiative.



Thank You



Co-produced by China Plate and Warwick Arts Centre. Co-commissioned by Bristol Old Vic Ferment. Funded by Arts Council England. Supported by Theatre Bristol's Company Producer, Mel Scaffold. With special thanks to Nick Walker.

Arts House, as a key program of the City of Melbourne, is Melbourne's contemporary centre for performance and interactive artforms. We support new and diverse ways to make and experience art which is participatory and experiential, interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary, curated through a balance of provocation, responsiveness and collaboration with artists and audiences.

For more information, please contact us on the details below.

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Bookings:
artshouse.com.au or
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Arts House acknowledges the traditional land upon which we are located, of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and pay our respect to Elders both past and present and, through them, to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

