

THANK YOU

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PIN DROP

TAMARA SAULWICK

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ABOUT PIN DROP

This project began in late 2008 as a series of one-on-one conversations that were audio recorded. In some cases the conversations were with people I knew, but more often they were with people I knew only a little or not at all. The people interviewed range in age from 6 to 92 years of age. I wanted to talk to people about their experiences of physical threat on a very personal level. I wasn't so interested in focusing on actual acts of violence – we are fed these every night on our TV screens. Instead, I was more interested in how the sensation of threat, real or imagined, plays out in the mind and body. And also in how these experiences of threat shape our choices in day-to-day life. What we will do? What we won't do? What feels too much of a risk?

The conversations I recorded were incredibly varied and full of amazing honesty, candour, trust, and insight. All the participants entered into the process with great generosity and it is their thoughts and stories that form the core of this work. Clearly, I have only included a fraction of the hours of recorded material that I collected during the initial phase of this project and some interviews remain entirely unused. However, each of the conversations I recorded has shaped and informed my approach to the making of **Pin Drop**, and I am indebted to all participants.

I would like to also acknowledge my collaborators, each of whom embraced my initial concept and has helped make it more vivid. Sincere thanks also to Margaret Trail who worked as dramaturg in the first development phase of the work and made an invaluable contribution to its development.

Tamara Saulwick

THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

By Urszula Dawkins

Threats – whether real or imagined – have a way or playing out within our bodies. A noise in the house at night: will you get up, throw the lights on, grab a baseball bat and investigate? Or freeze solid and listen, preparing to grab keys, jump out the window and find a place to hide? Or will you say ‘it’s just the wind’ and turn over and go back to sleep?

Pin Drop is a close-up look at fear, built around a series of audio interviews – true tales told by people about curly experiences. Listening to a super-suspenseful contemporary music work some years ago inspired Tamara Saulwick to make a performance work with a similar quality – a tension that would run from beginning to end. The music work involved “playing the

inside of a piano”; **Pin Drop** instead knocks and plucks at the mind’s dark corners, telling stories in order to elicit our own memories of threat, reaction and response.

Saulwick knows from experience that in a scary situation, no one can predict how they’ll behave.

“We imagine it and people play out scenarios in their minds,” Saulwick says, “but what actually happens in that moment of fight or flight – we don’t really know until the moment occurs.”

To create **Pin Drop**, Saulwick began by working with interviews she’d recorded, transcribing and sorting them – finding “clusters” of related themes and “stories that just jump out at you”. The primary relationship was always the relationship between live performance and sound; and sound always at the heart of a process in which Saulwick as performer interacts with the eleven pre-recorded voices.

“There’s a very fluid relationship between the live and the pre-recorded, constantly shifting from one to the other,” Saulwick says. “And then the voices are also embedded in quite a dense sound environment or score. A kind of sound-world gets built up, which eventually a story emerges out of, but the sound leads us into the story as opposed to being like a soundtrack.”

True story: Woken by the sound of footsteps in the attic above her room, many years ago, Saulwick lay in her bed, frozen. It was late at night in an old, ramshackle house. Her housemate was away. The steps came down the stairs and stopped outside her room.

Stories like this have a tendency to immediately bring up more stories. Working for the past few years with Melbourne Playback Theatre – an improvisational company that literally ‘plays back’ real stories told by audience members – Saulwick has been fascinated by how one story leads to another, exposing the differences and commonalities of emotional responses and experience.

“We love to hear each other’s stories and we really like hearing stories from ‘real people’,” she says. “It’s not the voice of authority, it’s not an expert, it’s not an actor or writer or playwright. [At Playback] it’s just someone who gets up and tells a story.”

“So I was interested in trying to bring in that quality of just listening to stories that everyone has. And bringing that into a kind of contemporary performance language, into a different kind of aesthetic.”

Working with several collaborators – including Peter Knight (sound design), Michelle Heaven (movement) and Ben Cobham (lighting) – has, says Saulwick, extended the original idea and made it “more itself”. “All of these languages, like the body, text and sound, are shifting in terms of major and minor,” she says, so that the ‘primary communicator’ in any given moment may be visual, aural, or even the imaginary.

“Sometimes we allow people to go into a listening space... [but] rather than just giving them blackness, there might just be a light moving through the space and we might see a body coming in or out of it...”

This is the space, says Saulwick, “where imagination can kick in”.

All she could think was that she had to get to the pile of clothes in the corner and hide underneath. But her body had ‘gone to jelly’. She could only drag herself, crawl across the space to the corner. The adrenaline had flooded her body and it just didn’t work. She heard the footsteps moving away, down another set of stairs. Then she heard the front door opening and someone else being let in.

Saulwick hopes **Pin Drop** is “a little bit edgy or a little bit scary” but is less interested in “horror” than in what we do with the idea of a threat, be it large or small.

“You start to talk to people about this stuff and you say ‘Would you walk down a street late at night by yourself?’ And there’s a variety of answers but regardless of whether people would or wouldn’t, everyone has their own personal ritual: Oh yeah, I walk with my head down not up, or I try and walk more like a bloke, or I talk on my telephone, or I hold my keys in this particular way – and everyone has a technique, it’s like a way of holding this feeling that is just very deep and natural, instinctive I suppose...”

Now two sets of footsteps ascended the stairs to the landing. Then she heard her bedroom door being pushed open.

The end to this story is “ultimately benign”, says Saulwick. But for all of us there’s a moment, she says, when our common sense is disrupted, where the sense of ‘don’t be silly, it’s just a noise’ is “fundamentally short-circuited” and no longer has any authority. What’s interesting is what we do after that moment, regardless of whether or not the situation is truly threatening.

“How does that affect the choices you make and how you live?” she says. “Because the strange thing about this stuff is that everyone’s just getting on with their lives, we’re not thinking about it all the time, but somewhere, we all live with it as well. Everyone navigates this stuff in very personal ways.”

CREATIVE TEAM

Creator/Performer: **Tamara Saulwick**
Composition/Sound Design/Operation: **Peter Knight**
Movement: **Michelle Heaven**
Design and Production: **Bluebottle – Ben Cobham and Frog Peck**
Costume Design: **Harriet Oxley**
Operation: **Bluebottle – James Russell**
Technical Audio Consultant: **Myles Mumford**
Project Management: **Moriarty’s Project**

Voices: **Alice Meyer, Ania Walwicz, Anni Finsterer, Cyndi Darnell, Jemana Stellato Pledger, Kate Neal, Leanne Jones, Libby, Lisa, Tracy, Yamuna.**

Interviewees have been credited by their full name, first name only or pseudonym, in accordance with their wishes.

BIOGRAPHIES

Tamara Saulwick

Tamara works as an independent actor, performance-maker, and director. Her training and experience have been in a diverse range of areas from dance, film and TV, indoor theatre and outdoor performance to large-scale outdoor community events. She has worked with a variety of independent artists and with many companies including Not Yet it’s Difficult, Born in a Taxi, Melbourne Theatre Company, Neil Cameron Productions, and with Justus Neumann in his Vienna based company Theaterverein zum aufgebundenen Baren. She was a founding member of outdoor performance groups Strange Fruit and The Hunting Party with whom she toured extensively both nationally and internationally. Since 2001 Tamara has been developing her own performance works including *map folding for beginners* (2001), *Imprint* (2005), and her latest work **Pin Drop** which marks significant new collaborations with Peter Knight, Michelle Heaven and Ben Cobham. Tamara is a current member of Melbourne Playback Theatre Company, having worked with the company since 2004. She will be performing in *The Waiting Room* with Born in a Taxi’s Public Floor Project at The Dog Theatre in September 2010. Tamara has a Masters degree in Animateuring from VCA (2001), a B.Ed in Drama/Dance/Design from Rusden (1986-1989) and is a graduate of The John Bolton Theatre School (1991). As well as receiving numerous grants to create new work, she has been the recipient of two Australia Council professional development grants; travelling to Belgrade in 2003 to work with Dah Teater and in 2007 to train with Siti Company in New York. She has also received the Jeanne Pratt Scholarship and is a current recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award enabling her to undertake a PhD in Performance Studies at Victoria University.

Peter Knight

Australian composer/trumpeter/sound artist, Peter Knight, is a multidisciplinary musician who has gained wide recognition for his eclectic approach, which integrates jazz, world music, and experimental traditions. Peter leads and composes for several ensembles including the internationally acclaimed cross-cultural sextet, Way Out West. He also performs solo, processing the trumpet through various electronic media. He has composed chamber music, short-film scores and created sound installations most notably with installation artist, Cameron Robbins, and sound art collective, Double Venturi. Peter is the recipient of numerous grants and awards including the 2009 Bell Award for Australian Jazz Ensemble of the Year (with Way Out West), a nomination for the 2008 APRA Awards (Jazz Composition of the Year), the Rolston Music Fellowship from the Banff Centre for the Arts, and the Keith and Elizabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship.

www.peterknightmusic.com

Michelle Heaven

As a creator Michelle is interested in animation-type movement of the human body, distorting its appearance through variance of rhythm, speed, scale and movement isolation. Michelle graduated from the VCA with a Bachelor of Dance in 1992 and Masters of Dance Performance in 2000. She has made extensive contributions as a performer collaborator and choreographer to both live theatre and film. Michelle has worked nationally and internationally with many prominent Australian choreographers and directors. Michelle is a recipient of The Dame Peggy Van Praagh Choreographic Scholarship, The Australian Post Graduate Award (Industry) Scholarship and Victorian Green Room Award. She was twice nominated for a Helpmann Award for her work with Chunky Move and her recent work *Disagreeable Object* was nominated for a 2009 Australian Dance Award and Victorian Green Room Award.

Ben Cobham

Ben is a family man. Often building – conquered the square, moving to angles and may one day reach the curve. As co-director of Bluebottle, Ben’s experience encompasses theatrical and commercial environments, local government and the business sector with work for galleries, museums, visitor centres and outdoor sites. Years of investigation, research and contribution within the realm of live theatre forms the foundation upon which he continues to build. Ben graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts with a Diploma of Dramatic Arts in 1991. Since then Ben has extensive experience with many of Australia’s leading arts companies and directors both nationally and internationally.

The outstanding work of Bluebottle was honoured with the 2007 and 2008 Green Room John Truscott Award for Excellence in Design.

Harriet Oxley

Harriet graduated from the VCA in 2004 where she was awarded the Fergus Chandler Award for Theatre Design. She also holds a BA in Fashion Design from RMIT. Harriet’s designs include Victorian Opera’s *The Bear/Angelique* and Snow Queen, Dislocate’s *The Key*, circa NICA’s *Do Not Pass Go*, Sean Curham’s *Boxed Spring Picture* at the Australian Choreographic Centre and Red Stitch’s *Vincent in Brixton* and *I Am Yours*. She has designed costumes for several short films and for television series pilot *Pharaoh’s Leap*. In 2010 she will be designing costumes for Stephanie Lake’s *Mix Tape* for Chunky Move. Harriet designed installations for company x:machine’s *Senseless* and *Serial Blogger* which received a Green Room Nomination for design.

Frog Peck

Frog makes, supports and top notches with many folk in dance, theatre and fashion. He has set people on fire, choreographed furniture and danced naked in the wings. As part of the Bluebottle team Frog’s recent credits include; lighting design on Kate Neal’s composition development *Semaphore*, production for Helen Herbertson and Ben Cobham’s *Sunstruck*, and design implementation for The Australian National Academy of Music’s *Seven Words*. After graduating from the VCA he began working as a dance stage manager and has toured with the likes of Chunky Move, Circus Oz, Kage Physical Theatre, Meow Meow and Back To Back Theatre. Frog continues to collaborate with dance and performance artists including Michelle Heaven, Carlee Mellow, Tamara Saulwick, Gabrielle Rose, Rogue, and on Lucy Guerin’s ‘Pieces for Small Spaces’. Frog has just finished working with Jenny Kemp on *Madeleine*.