FREE THEATRE PRESENTS

17th June - 2nd July

The Gym, The Arts Centre

Booking: www.freetheatre.org.nz



Christchurch City

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EDUCATION PACK

## THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

THANKS TO OUR PRINCIPAL FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS FOR FRANKENSTEIN:









FREE THEATRE CHRISTCHURCH RECEIVES PRINCIPAL AND CORE FUNDING FROM:





IN ADDITION TO OUR FRIENDS AND VOLUNTEERS FREE THEATRE CHRISTCHURCH IS ALSO GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS:

















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VENUE: The Gym, The Arts Centre of Christchurch,

Worcester Boulevard.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCES: Tues 21 June, Wed 22 June, Tues 28 June, Wed 29 June.

**RUNNING TIME:** 85 minutes without an interval.

**SUITABILITY:** This production is especially suited for Years 11-13.

# FRANKENSTEIN

**Dr Frankenstein** 

lgor

Tiki

**Bearded Lady** 

**Bride/Pandora** 

**False Maria** 

The Fly

Ariel

**Echoes** 

**Oceanides** 

**Prometheus** 

**Director** 

**Set and Lighting** 

**Costumes/Puppets** 

**Producers** 

Front of House

**Ubu's Bar** 

George Parker

Andrew Clarke

Aaron Hapuku

Greta Bond

Emma Johnston

Marian McCurdy

MicaëlDoljnikoff

Jenny Ritchie

Rory Dalley

Reuben Derrick

Stuart McKay

Peter Falkenberg

Stuart Lloyd-Harris

Free Theatre Ensemble

George Parker

Marian McCurdy

Volunteers

T'Nealle Joie





## **ABOUT THE COMPANY:**

Free Theatre Christchurch (est. 1979) is a professional theatre collective based in Christchurch, New Zealand. Peter Falkenberg is the founder and Artistic Director of the company. As the country's longest running producer of experimental theatre, the company offers a unique experience for artists and audiences not catered for by local commercial and amateur theatres.

The Free Theatre works as an ensemble, conceiving work from an initial idea and developing it over a longer period of time. This work often takes place in spaces that are not conventional in terms of theatre. As a professional art theatre, Free Theatre is closer in creative process to contemporary dance companies or international experimental art theatre groups such as Ex Machina or The Wooster Group that create exciting new work by pushing beyond generic boundaries.

The company works with artistic collaborators from diverse disciplines and with diverse and unusual texts (literary, filmic, musical, social and cultural) to produce completely new and original work that engages directly with time and place. Core ensemble members undertake years of professional training in different performance techniques and traditions and conduct ongoing company training. Free Theatre ensemble members also regularly participate in and lead professional theatre classes locally, nationally and internationally.

# ABOUT THE FRANKENSTEIN STORY:



(Photo of writer Mary Shelley: Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

**Author:** Born in London, England in 1797 writer Mary Shelley is best known for her horror novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818). She was married to poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Plot: Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus tells the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who creates life via an unorthodox scientific experiment and is then horrified by what he has created. The monster ends up murdering Dr Frankenstein's wife and the novel ends on the North Pole where Dr Frankenstein dies from hypothermia and exhaustion chasing the monster in an attempt to seek revenge.

Fact: In 1815 when she was only 18 years old Mary Shelley lost her first child who only lived a few days. That summer, she and her husband travelled to Switzerland with fellow writers Lord Byron and John Polidori. The group entertained themselves one rainy day by reading a book of ghost stories. They decided to have a competition to see who could write the best horror story. Mary Shelley then began work on what would become her most famous novel.

Modern Prometheus: The Modern Prometheus is the novel's subtitle. Prometheus, in later versions of Greek mythology, was the Titan who created mankind at the behest of Zeus. He made a being in the image of the gods that could have a spirit breathed into it.



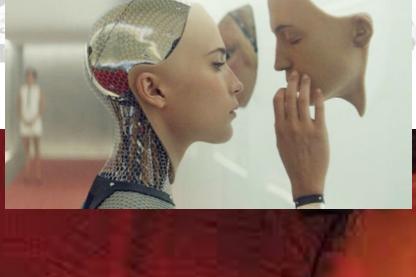
"When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, a monster, a blot upon the earth from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?"

Mary Shelley, Frankenstein



Shelley's *Frankenstein* story has been a popular inspiration for many independent and Hollywood films. One of these that created the distinctive Dr Frankenstein look was James Wales's 1931 *Frankenstein* film starring Boris Karloff as the monster (see promotional image of Boris Karloff as monster, right) and the recent *Ex Machina* directed by Alex Garland and starring Alicia VIkander and Oscar Isaac in 2015 (see below)





Numerous musicals and stage productions of the Frankenstein story include the 2011 National Theatre London production starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny Lee-Miller. In this production directed by Danny Boyle, both lead actors took turns playing Victor Frankenstein and the monster, swapping the roles over from one performance to the next.



# ABOUT FREE THEATRE'S FRANKENSTEIN:

Actor George Parker speaks

George Parker played the role of Frankenstein as well as coproducing the production



"We began from an initial idea and theatrical frame (presentation/sales pitch) proposed by the director and we set about researching different texts (literary, sonic, theatrical, filmic, political, cultural) and experimented with material in the workshop process."

"The Director worked with the skills and perspectives that each collaborator brought to the project (e.g. sound art, aerial work, kapa haka). This devising process with experimental theatre isn't just a matter of sticking random pieces together but working with different ideas to help develop the central questions we are exploring leading to a collage that forms the final performance. Material is added and discarded to develop a coherent through-line to the performance."

"I developed the opening (presentation/sales pitch) in conversation with the director, incorporating different texts and working within and playing with the popular forms of the contemporary presentation (TEDx/Pecha Kucha) and the sales pitch (Steve Jobs, Elon Musk) and engaging with our current social and political environment."

"In this way, the audience is positioned from the outset, to be involved, to play a role in a sense, to be complicit with the ideas we are exploring. There is no fourth wall. This is established from the outset and maintained throughout, with action happening throughout the performance and all around the space so there is a multi-focus rather than a single point of focus on stage - the whole space is the stage in many ways. This is not to confuse but to provide different perspectives to the questions the company is exploring."

"A diversity of texts spoke to our ideas of perfection. Perhaps one interpretation of the piece might be that Dr Frankenstein is obsessed with the idea of perfection, which cannot help being a social construct given that we are inherently social beings - so the idea of perfection is itself a construct that

speaks to an end, a final point of being. But maybe being is always about becoming, never fixed but always being searched for and this is ultimately what he discovers with the 'body without organs' an Artaudian idea juxtaposed with a beginning that has elements that might be described as Brechtian, involving the audience in what is being discussed. But this is not with a view to presenting a final moral or answer. The point is to provoke questions and a conversation that continues beyond the performance. One of the questions we are always asking, is what is theatre now?"

"The idea was to create a contemporary Frankenstein. And that there are certain ideas we are interested in exploring for which Frankenstein (the first myth of modern times) is ideally suited. This is introduced from the opening with a contemporary presentation that ties together the traditional story everyone knows and then introduces ideas that explore what that story means now in our own time and place."

"I used Prezi presentation (a new, updated form of powerpoint presentation technology). This incorporated images and film to provide a recognisable theatrical form that positioned the audience as participants in the event. It can't be understated how important theatrical form is to developing this kind of work. By playing with the conventions of a particular theatrical form (the contemporary presentation/sales pitch) we are able to shape the work. As many of these kind of presentations turn into a kind of circus (they owe some of their ideas to circus) this allows us to include elements that are unusual for conventional theatre."

"I took my cue from modern entrepreneurs that perform on stage to sell us the latest technology - e.g. Elon Musk. So the aim was to be contemporary and make a bridge from our everyday lives into the unusual of Frankenstein's lab."



# SPEAK FOR YOURSELF:

- What do you understand by the term "experimental theatre"? What were your expectations as an audience member to the performance and how were these met?
- What effect did breaking the fourth wall have on your experience as an audience member?
- One of the themes in the production was the invention and creation of new technologies and Dr Frankenstein questions whether these will either improve our lives or ultimately destroy us. What kinds of technologies were used in the production? Give one example and explain how it was used theatrically.
- What is the relationship between Dr Frankenstein and his monster/s?
- Dr Frankenstein talked about scientists and artists having a lot in common. What do you think he meant by that and do you agree?
- Why do you think the *Frankenstein* story remains so fascinating in our culture?



#### **SET & LIGHTING DESIGN:**

Designer Stuart Lloyd-Harris speaks

"Early in Shelley's Frankenstein Captain Walton describes seeing a gigantic figure disappearing across the arctic ice. "We watched the rapid

progress of the traveller with our telescopes until he was lost among the distant inequalities of the ice." For me this became the image that started my process of designing the set. I don't like to read too much of a script or book before I start the design process, sometimes working from an early impression is best."

"I also avoid researching other historical set designs or representations. These can often be powerful images that are a distraction to creating something original. Sometimes (as with Frankenstein) they are such a part of popular culture that they are hard to avoid, images of crazy scientists and electricity are strongly associated with this piece, as are monsters with bolts in their necks. The problem with this is that at the time Shelley was writing electricity was still considered mysterious and potent, a modern audience will not be convinced that electricity is magical as it is now familiar and well understood, for me this is where theatre sometimes loses its potency where clearly unbelievable conclusions are presented."

"Whilst budget and time are considerations when designing and building sets they shouldn't be a starting point. One early idea I had was to have a salt clock, like an hourglass, running as the audience entered. The original design was much more elaborate but with such a short build time it had to be simplified, the same effect was produced but the finished diamond used for the show was much quicker to build."

"When designing for theatre productions context is important to consider, the physical environment your design will sit within, the shape of the theatre, the relationship between the audience and the stage, the current political and social environment, it is worth considering what the audience will bring to the production in terms of expectations and understanding. Whilst this cant be known completely there are many components around which assumptions can be made."

"Once I have a concept I start looking for materials. This is where the budget starts to impact your decisions. I like to start the hunt for materials early, sometimes you will find something that is perfect early on, other times you will find something that catches your eye and you know will look great under light, this may change the nature of your design and spark other ideas."



"One thing to consider is how all the materials will relate to each other. Another idea I like to explore is having an honesty with the materials I use. Rather than trying to make a plastic chair look wooden highlight the fact that it is plastic, having some material integrity will mean the audience can see what something is made of and are less likely to feel cheated or deceived, it allows them to get on with seeing the whole picture rather than finding fault with, for example, the quality of the woodgrain effect."

"Light is only interesting in the context of darkness. Too much light and the magic is lost. In the antarctic winter there are periods when the sun never rises. I wanted to convey an idea of the dim light from a moon or sun that stays below the horizon."

"It's the shadows that helps us to read objects as being three dimensional. I made sure that light would fall across parts of the set that I wanted to stand out as three dimensional objects, some components of the set were also translucent as I had used frost cloth to clad stages and the puppet theatre."

"I also purchased items for the set from an army surplus supplier. Snow camouflage, a white parachute, and some military cargo webbing that was used to tie up prometheus. The idea of using military equipment came from the fact that accessing the Antarctic is often via military transport."

"As Frankenstein was a devised piece of theatre there was no script to read when we started the process. I had a discussion with the director and started drawing my ideas for an antarctic scene. I model all my set designs in 3D using SketchUp. This allows me to revise designs and experiment with placement of set objects, check sight lines and means that when it comes to building the set all the measurements can be accurately pulled from the computer model."

"The set is often the first component of the show that the audience experiences. This sets the mood of the show, the audience expectations of where the story is set and gives context for the performances."



## SPEAK FOR YOURSELF:

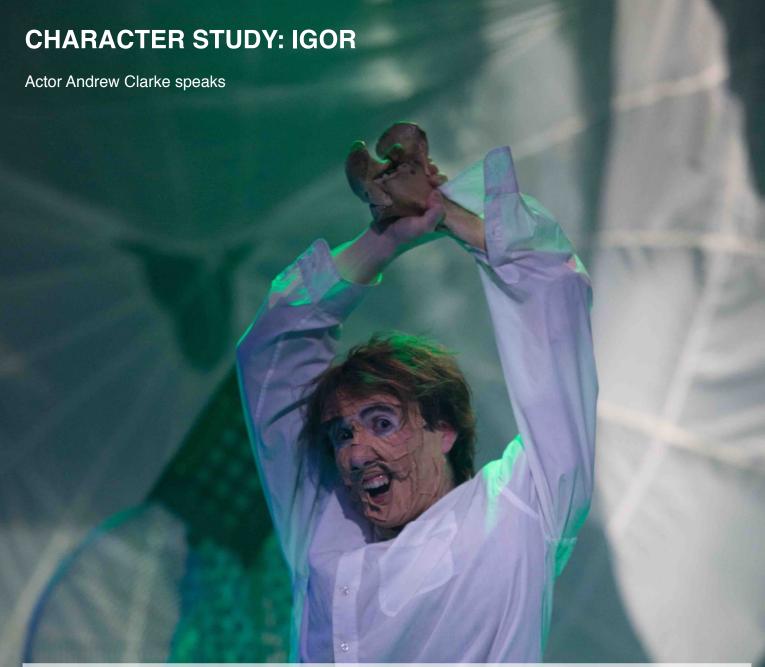
- What set design feature were you most attracted to and how did it affect the performance?
- What did you notice about lighting and how it was used in the performance, discuss one example.

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"Igor does not appear in the original novel. A hunchback servant is introduced in the James Whale film, albeit under the name Fritz. His presence stirred in me the recognition of something archetypal. One of the archetypal ideas concerning the other-shaped person, is that they are in some way endowed with a consecrated craft and wisdom. Dwarves in mythologies have long been seen as keepers of secrets, gifted with uncanny powers and deftly manipulating otherly materials well before J.R.R.Tolkein and George R.R. Martin's respective mythologies."

"These aspects whilst not immediately applicable, intimated to me that Igor would have to be, in spite of his frequent portrayal as somewhat bumbling and buffoonish, a creature with some intelligence. And if there is some intelligence in a creature, servitude is not long suffered."

"These archetypes also gave justification for the bandage mask. It is a visage most often seen in fearful contexts. In hospitals, war zones, zombies and undead mummies. The faces being beyond recognition, the forensics team identified the victims by their bodies alone. We see it as a temporary chrysalis for those undergoing plastic surgery. Plastic surgery being a permanent changing of one's expression. A visual reference to the work of Orlan."

"The idea of using medical tape was a result of experimenting with facial grimaces. Wanting to distort my features, I initially tried to create a mask with the muscles of my face alone. But to sustain this over the whole performance would have been exhausting and delimiting."

"As I experimented with tape, I watched how various parts of my face moved in sympathy with others. My eyes would subtly droop as I lowered my jaw. I then placed tape on my face connecting my jaw with the corners of my eyes. When now lowering my jaw, the eyes and nose, dragged down exposing the red of my under-eyes. This exposition of the hidden is seen as quite excitatory. It crosses a limit, changes the geography of the body. A hint at the body without organs."

"Initially we built the third arm of Igor to be the beginning of a human sized puppet. But, as we had been working with the texts of the archetypically malformed rebel, we attempted to create a more grotesque form for Igor. The bonearm we fitted with a harness, allowing it to be worn un-handled. It caused a quite considerable hump of shoulder. Experimenting with this prosthetic arm as well as my hidden one led to more opportunity for the uncanny, for grotesque."

"The hand is often used to represent power. The hand of God. The right hand man. The eight-armed Vishnu and the thousand limbs in hagiographies of Buddhas. The hand of Caesar in the colosseum. The Invisible hand of the Market. Understanding is grasping a concept. So there is a repressed power. And it is this repressed power which is most curious, most exploratory. It is in fact the power which demasks Igor. The third hand also points to the body without organs, the shifting not-ever-finished not ever exactly delineated form. In the same way that Stelarc transgresses the limits of the average human body with his prosthetic ear."

"The physicality of Igor was born from the weight of the false-arm. The leaning forward, the stiff swing of the bones. Animal movement images were crow and magpie based, as they walked, stiff legged, with the arms pinioned."

"I used as text John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, relating the biblical Lapse into Sin, and the Struggles of Satan. Igor's declaration to the audience is Satan's own. Other texts we sourced from Shakespeare. The archetype of arcane master with grotesque servant, we found in Prospero and Caliban. Othello and lago also

furnished text. Edmund from *King Lear*, Macbeth, the titular Danish Prince, Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Richard the III nee Gloucester. and Cassius Brutus of *Julius Caesar*."

"All these Shakespearean characters cohered. The unifying factor? Transgression. Individualism. Rebellion. Shakespeare lived in a time where the coordinates of reality were exposed as changeable. The absolutes of religion had been broken in the conflicts between Protestant and Catholic denominations and the absolutes of gender were tweaked when King of England became a Queen."

"Amidst all this, a bourgeois revolution was slowly taking place, with the persons of lesser class status able to, through mercantile, industrial or in-other-ways artful wit, carve out for themselves a comfortable and influential place in an upper echelon of society."

"Shakespeare himself had a lower class start to life, was not university educated (a fact he was upbraided with in his own lifetime) but had enough business savvy to survive and in a small way thrive. Popular as he was, with both plebian and prince, Shakespeare was cautiously polarising, ensuring the individuals, intriguing and central though they often are, in overreaching come to a sorry end. It does account perhaps for some of our modern fascination for these characters. This idea of overreach we tied into another of our production themes - the Nietzchean Overman."



#### **AERIALS:**

Ariel (Jenny Ritchie): "As a professional aerialist, my role was to coach and train the ensemble in the basics of aerial performance, to work with the designer and director to design the apparatus as well as to perform in the production."

"I was Ariel, from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. An ethereal sprite; a creation from another realm that served its master, Prospero, similar to how Igor, himself a creation, served Dr Frankenstein. I had 5 lines from *The Tempest* and I sung this with another performer while in the air. We used fabric to create hanging cocoon like incubators and a playground of ropes to move through that allowed me to stay in the air for the whole show."

"Because the equipment can be rough on our skin, I created a costume that looked like it





(cont.) "was my skin but not human. I tried to create texture and colour that made me look like I had just been born."

"It is a wonderful thing when everyone in your team commits 100% to exploring and developing their own characters and when everyone is open to all ideas and takes no rejection of concepts or improvement advice personally. For when creating something collectively, it is no longer about YOU, it is about a new creation."

False Maria (Marian McCurdy):

"False Maria is a character from Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*. She is a robot that was created by the boss of an an organisation and his inventor to seduce and create chaos amongst the workers in his factory to keep them in line. I also used a 18th century text from philosopher La Mettrie who argued that a human is nothing but a machine and that an embryo just looks like an egg with two dots."

"In this scene where we emerged from our pods, Dr Frankenstein lit us with UV black light. This created a science-fiction sterile, laboratory-like environment for the scene. This was one of the set designers early ideas and so we made sure the silks were white to enhance this lighting effect."



- In Free Theatre's *Frankenstein* several different monsters were created (not just one, as in the original Mary Shelley novel). What kinds of physical theatre styles were used in the performance to represent these different monsters?
- The body is an important element of many experimental theatres and text is often not the most important thing. Discuss one example of the way of the body was used in the performance that is different compared to conventional theatre performances you have seen?
- This performance was created by the company collaboratively. What do you think the benefits and challenges are of working like this?
- How did music affect your experience of the performance?
- Free Theatre updated the *Frankenstein* story for modern times by alluding to inventors and artists like Stelarc, Orlan, Elon Musk and Steve Jobs. Can you think of any other examples of contemporary Frankenstein figures?
- What character in the performance intrigued you and why?

#### **ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES:**

MARY SHELLEY, FRANKENSTEIN and FREE THEATRE

- Shelley, Mary. (1818). Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus. URL: <a href="https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=2Zc3AAAAYAAJ&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false">https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=2Zc3AAAAYAAJ&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false</a>
- Online Resources and links for Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*. URL: <a href="http://www.marywshelley.com/sources/mary-shelley-and-frankenstein-sites/">http://www.marywshelley.com/sources/mary-shelley-and-frankenstein-sites/</a>
- Free Theatre Christchurch website with critical reviews of the *Frankenstein* performance and more info and images. URL: <a href="http://www.freetheatre.org.nz/frankenstein.html">http://www.freetheatre.org.nz/frankenstein.html</a>

#### FREE THEATRE EDUCATION

Our Free Theatre Education Programme seeks to encourage young people to develop an active interest in experimental theatre both as audiences and as participants. We run workshops in The Gym in the Arts Centre and in schools specialising in puppetry, mask and physical theatre for all levels. Please contact us directly if you would like to arrange a workshop for your school or see our website for more info and to sign up to our mailing list.

#### **CURRICULUM LINKS**

Free Theatre Education activities have direct relevance to many of the NCEA achievement standards levels 1-3

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