

DISTRACTION CAMP

Press Kit



A Free Theatre Christchurch Production

www.freetheatre.org.nz

Wellington Tour 2010 @ BATS, 1 Kent Terrace
Tuesday 31 August – Saturday 11 September (excluding Sun/Mon)
Contact: admin@freetheatre.org.nz or call 03 3653159



DISTRACTION CAMP

Director	Peter Falkenberg
Designer	Chris Reddington
Film and Images	Ryan Reynolds
Music Arrangement	Peter Falkenberg
	Chris Reddington
	Nicole Reddington
	Emma Johnston
Lighting	Aidan Simons
Front of House	Toni Radics
Dance Instructor	Kerry Mulligan
Text Translation	Sue Hassell
	Alejandra Mercado
Dress Designer	Holly Liberona
Photography	Tjalling De Vries
Producers	George Parker
	Greta Bond
	Liz Boldt

CAST

Madame	Greta Bond
The Bishop	Ryan Reynolds
Judith	Coralie Winn
The Judge	Simon Troon
Salome	Marian McCurdy
Johanna	Liz Boldt
The Camp Commandant	George Parker
Delilah	Emma Johnston
Cello	Nicole Reddington
Piano	Chris Reddington

Running Time: 80 minutes

Book @ BATS: (04) 802 4175 or email book@bats.co.nz

Ticket prices: \$20 / \$13

Synopsis

Distraction Camp takes place in a House of Illusions. Inside, live music is performed by a pianist and cellist as actors tango together. Between dances and songs, the actors move to dressing areas at the edge of the stage, and prepare for a series of performances, given for the audience and for each other. A bishop hears the confession of a young penitent, and gives penance. A judge hears the testimony of a thief, who is consequently punished by an ominous masked figure. A camp commandant trains his “horse” – a young woman who must be disciplined and put through her paces. A woman sings soulfully in remembrance of times past. The thief sings for the camp commandant, and in reward is given the head of her torturer in a box...



“Distraction Camp, Free Theatre's latest production, has at its heart a delicious contradiction whereby sensuous, bizarre, exotic and theatrical images uncover an arid, soulless world.”

Alan Scott, *The Press*, December 2009

*“Unlike most shows I programme at BATS, I was fortunate enough to see the opening night of *Distraction Camp* in November last year. One of the first things that struck me about the work is that the style is nothing like work that comes out of Wellington right now, which is one of the main reasons I programmed it. I believe that it is important for Wellington audiences and practitioners to see this style of work to challenge the status quo and incite discussion.”*

Steph Walker, Programme Manager, BATS

Free Theatre in Wellington

Distraction Camp is the acclaimed follow-up production to Free Theatre Christchurch's award-winning *Faust Chroma*. Here's what Wellington critics had to say about *Faust Chroma*:



"Faust Chroma embeds itself in your memory and is deeply rewarding. Peter Falkenberg's direction is gutsy and quite unlike anything I've seen before, fitting the text like a glove... The whole cast is mind-blowing in a production that pushes them all emotionally and physically... This is a touring production from Christchurch's Free Theatre and we can only hope to see more of them up here."

Lynn Freeman, *The Capital Times*, Wellington

"A particular skill of this company appears to be creating visually stunning moments which are full of impact as they assault the eye and ear... I was extremely thankful to the Free Theatre for bringing this work up from Christchurch."

Helen Sims, *The Lumiere Reader*

"Faust Chroma is a shot in the arm for alternative theatre: a rich feast for the senses and the intellect that lingers well after the final chromatic scale fades to silence."

John Smythe, *Theatreview*, Wellington

Free Theatre Christchurch (www.freetheatre.org.nz)

Free Theatre Christchurch was established in 1982 as an incorporated society with its own theatre in the Christchurch Arts Centre (New Zealand). Its original mission statement included the following objectives: to stage old and new rarely staged European plays in original translations, new New Zealand plays, and classical English texts in an unusual and experimental style. From the start the emphasis has been on non-verbal action and high production standards, discouraging the star system and encouraging long rehearsal and training periods in a company context.

Over a series of projects that include *Last Days of Mankind*, *Footprints/Tapuwaē*, *Samson Airline*, *Fantasia*, *Philoctetes*, *Diana Down Under*, *Ella and Susn*, *Faust Chroma*, *Distraction Camp* and *Doctor Faustus*, a committed ensemble has developed under the direction of Peter Falkenberg. The ensemble has ventured outside of Christchurch and received a number of awards and nominations:

- * 2009 Nominee for The Montana Award, Most Original Production (*Faust Chroma*), Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards
- * 2009 Award for Best Theatre (*Ella and Susn*) at the Dunedin Fringe Festival
- * 2009 Nominee for Best Production Design (*Ella and Susn*), Dunedin Fringe Festival
- * 2009 Award for Best Production Design (*Faust Chroma*), Wellington Fringe Festival
- * 2008 Award for Best Theatre (*Faust Chroma*) at the Dunedin Fringe Festival
- * 2008 Nominee for Best Production Design (*Faust Chroma*), Dunedin Fringe Festival

Free Theatre Christchurch is assembling a repertoire of old and new works to tour nationally and internationally, and developing an archive of its remarkable 30-year history.



Director's Statement about DISTRACTION CAMP

It starts with the actors cleaning the beautiful wood of the especially constructed dance floor, a stage on the stage that becomes a meta-stage but also a fetish that needs to be revered and knelt down to and made into an altar in the cleaning process. When the actors put on



their tango shoes and for the first dance step onto the stage, this becomes a kind of initiation into the world of the tango/brothel as well as of the distraction camp in which they have to perform. The ambiguity of the theatre as glamorous, shiny fantasy world which is surrounded by mirrors that enable vanity, narcissism and exhibitionism, and the possibility of humiliation and degradation are prefigured and established. The tango dance has the same kind of ambiguities of power and submission, glamour and dirt, as do the three scenes of Jean Genet's *The Balcony* that are quoted in the production – the Bishop, the Judge and the General/Camp Commandant scenes – and the three pieces of films which are enacted – from *Frida*, *The Tango Lesson*, and *The Night Porter* (all films directed by women: Julie Taymor, Sally Potter, Lisa Cavani).

At base, I staged *Distraction Camp* as a performative enquiry into the nature of acting through theatre and film, song and dance. *Distraction Camp* is designed to sit conceptually in relation (not quite opposition) to the “concentration camp.” My premise for the production is provocative: whereas the experience of the concentration camp was one of scarcity and hunger, the current experience of late capitalism (following Baudrillard in *Fatal Strategies*) is one of obesity and obscenity, which ironically can be seen to lead to the same effect. Forced endlessly to consume entertainments that revolve endlessly around distractions and commodities, audiences have become like the Muselman, resigned to a way of living without meaning, obese yet starved of real nourishment.

Our idea that we live in a free world, which is being continuously fostered by the media, may turn out to be an illusion. In *The Theatre and its Double*, Antonin Artaud says “We are not free... And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all” (79). In Genet's *The Balcony*, the re-enactment of perversity in the brothel is mirrored and shown to be the same as outside; the outside needs what happens in the brothel, because whatever is called bad or evil can be projected into it and thereby disavowed. Taking *The Balcony* as inspiration, *Distraction Camp* questions itself as theatre and its own *raison d'être*, and asks: are we creating our own House of Illusions in the Free Theatre? Is the work we do just another escape, or is it a counter-world to the outside, to the late capitalist, which is a perverted world from our perspective. Do we just escape into a now more nostalgic than utopian illusion, or are we still rehearsing for a revolution, creating another way of living that can catch on and infiltrate the outside world in the way that Artaud envisioned the theatre as a plague?

Selected Praise for Free Theatre Christchurch

“To achieve such a high standard of production working with new and complex material, the Free Theatre workshops new scripts with an intensity that is unusual in New Zealand. The results are exciting and unique.”

Christoph Muecher, Director, Goethe-Institut New Zealand

"For over quarter of a century Free Theatre has refined cultural horizons and shaped Christchurch's perceptions of contemporary theatre."

Chris Moore, Arts Editor, *The Press*

“Free Theatre holds a unique place in the arts culture that is an integral part of the best that Christchurch and New Zealand has to offer in terms of theatre experiences. They create annual workshops and performances that are also used to inform the study of many theatre and film students based in the South Island. They have international connections with the performance world and use this to their advantage”

Nā Te Rita Papesch, Chair, Kanohi Kitea Trust

“Christchurch is well served by this young and innovative theatre company which presents challenges to its audiences through the material and manner in which it is presented. We need these kinds of boundary-breaking groups to keep the local arts culture stimulated and forward-thinking. There is no doubt that the works Free Theatre undertake are always done with great deliberation and from a rigorous intellectual base. The cast’s professional approach sees them achieving laudable standards.”

Brendon Burns, Member of Parliament, Christchurch Central

“I’m writing in support of the theatre troupe, Free Theatre Christchurch. I became familiar with their exquisite work during my fellowship stay at the Canterbury University in New Zealand. In particular their FAUST CHROMA made a lasting impact on me since the entire team has achieved in this production a rare level of expressive poetry on stage. In my opinion their magnificent work should be seen worldwide - such an innovative and, at the same time, professional theatrical work is a rare and remarkable feat.”

Lech Majewski, Director/Producer. www.lechmajewski.com

“No other theatre company in Christchurch, and quite possibly New Zealand, has so consistently shown the intellectual vigour and creative daring of this group. Productions are always topical, original and ingenious, provocative and daringly different from those delivered by the mainstream companies and groups in Christchurch and in the wider New Zealand theatre context. This originality and creativity applies alike to stage design and construction, direction, scripting, and acting, which itself is invariably very much about interacting with the audience, whether in the theatre or the street or the shopping mall.”

Ross and Lorraine Gray, long-time patrons of Free Theatre Christchurch

Free Theatre Christchurch would like to thank the following for supporting *Distraction Camp*:



Te Puna Toi

Performance Research Project
Theatre and Film Studies

www.tepunatoi.canterbury.ac.nz



Wellington City

