



PRESS PACK

CONTENTS

PRESS RELEASE

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE 2004 PRODUCTIONS

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

COMPANY HISTORY

INFORMATION ON SARAH KANE

THOUGHTS BEHIND *HEAD* BY PLAYWRIGHT ZOË SIMON

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at The Smirnoff Underbelly, Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2004

Fail Better Productions return to The Smirnoff Underbelly at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe with two unique productions for 2004, following their critically acclaimed sell-out success with Sarah Kane's *Crave* in 2002.

PHAEDRA'S LOVE by Sarah Kane

Fail Better continue where they left off in 2002, by bringing a new production of Sarah Kane's least performed play to the Fringe. First debuted at the Gate in 1996, *Phaedra's Love* is a brutal yet darkly comic adaptation of the classic myth of desperate love and obsession. In a royal palace, in an unknown time or place, Phaedra is secretly in love with her stepson Hippolytus, the obnoxious and amoral prince. When the truth about this forbidden desire comes crashing out, the family is ripped apart, with shocking consequences. Performed in the atmospheric vaults of the Underbelly, *Phaedra's Love* is a powerful play, given a new lease of life in this timely revival.

HEAD by Zoë Simon

Playing in the same space, Fail Better's second production is a brand new play by a talented new writer, which receives its world premiere at the festival. Set on a South London estate, *Head* follows the story of two young lovers, Head and Urchin. At times ferocious, at times delicate, this is a stunning piece about destructive love and the terrors of adolescence. Zoë Simon's previous plays include *After Dark* and *The Daughter of Frankenstein*. She collaborated with the company in 2003 on their devised piece *Echo and Narcissus* and has recently become Fail Better's Associate Artist. Her latest work is not to be missed.

Fail Better Productions is a growing collective of young theatre artists who strive for immediacy and intensity in textually rich and visually arresting performance. Previous work includes the Pinter Double Bill (Warwick Arts Centre; WCMD, Cardiff; the Play in English Festival, Bratislava, Slovakia; and the RSC Summerhouse; 2001), *Crave* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe; 2002); and *Echo and Narcissus* (White Bear Theatre, London; 2003).

Critical acclaim for Fail Better's work includes:

'**gut-wrenchingly effective**' **** The Scotsman (on *Crave*)

'**a diamond of a show**' **** The List (on *Crave*)

'**challenging, gripping, creative ... the acting is assured.**' The Stage (on *Echo and Narcissus*)

'**a short visually arresting piece.**' Time Out (on *Echo and Narcissus*)

The 2004 Fail Better Season is supported by



For more information, photographs or to arrange interviews, please contact Publicity Officer Claire Hilton on 07017 413 813 or at failbetterproductions@hotmail.com. To arrange press tickets call The Smirnoff Underbelly press room on 0131 226 1240. For further information please visit www.failbetter.co.uk or www.theunderbelly.co.uk. NB. Both shows contain strong language and scenes that are unsuitable for children.

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE 2004 PRODUCTIONS



Head by Zoë Simon

'The worst kid in the park now'

Sometimes ferocious, sometimes delicate, this is a tale of destructive love between two young delinquents. Set on a South London estate, this stunning new play is premiered by a 'young, unhyped, first-rate company' List. Fail Better's devised show Echo and Narcissus received critical acclaim on the London fringe last summer.

5th-29th August (not 16th) at 18.15

The Big Belly, The Smirnoff Underbelly, Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2004

'Speak. Speak the truth. Dad said speak the truth. Doesn't have to be big, doesn't have to be great. Not spectacular, not even spectacular. On that day, on that ordinary day, blackness above her, blackness beneath. Under that dirty sky...'

Playwright Zoë Simon says: 'I began with a young woman who had an unstoppable desire to express herself. That was in June 2003. A year later, I now have the sixth and final draft of a full-length play about a doomed relationship in a deeply violent, savagely beautiful world. *Head* examines the most complex and extreme human emotions, but also the simple excitement of being in love for the first time. It confronts the difficulties involved in growing up and the incompatibility of individuality and party politics. On a more abstract level it looks at the objective versus the subjective. Neither I, nor Jonathan Heron, who worked with me as a Dramaturg on *Head*, had any idea that we would end up where we have. However, we are both fearless when it comes to theatre, so we were quite happy to abandon the roller coaster ride in favour of hurling ourselves off the precipice.'

Phaedra's Love by Sarah Kane

'It burns. Meant to be. We were. Meant to be.'



This powerful retelling of the Phaedra myth mixes brutality and beauty, revealing a royal family ripped apart by obsessive love. Fail Better return to The Smirnoff Underbelly following their massive success with Sarah Kane's *Crave* in 2002 ('a diamond of a show' List).

5th-29th August (not 16th) at 21.00

The Big Belly, The Smirnoff Underbelly, Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2004

'You're difficult. Moody, cynical, bitter, fat, decadent, spoilt. You stay in bed all day then watch TV all night, you crash around this house with sleep in your eyes and not a thought for anyone. You're in pain. I adore you.'

Director Jonathan Heron says: 'Vitality and immediacy will be central to this production which will honour Kane's juxtaposition of beauty and brutality - a constant throughout her work gathering in pace with *Cleansed* and concluding with *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*. Although the first scene features the initial stage direction 'A royal palace', Kane then describes Hippolytus' disgusting and degraded state. It is through this contrast of brutalised beauty that the production will operate. In both design and performances, a sense of royalty and ritual will be established. This is so the action of the play can unfold and heighten dramatic tension by debasing royalty and interrupting ritual. In fact, the show will be directed as a sweep towards chaos, where the constructed hierarchy will be torn apart by human emotion. The privacy of the palace at the beginning of the play can no longer contain the events and the final scene erupts into the public world.'

COMPANY BIOGRAPHIES

Gary Abrahams

Doctor/Theseus in *Phaedra's*

Love / PH in *Head*

Originally from South Africa, Gary has worked in theatre, television and film around Australia. A collaborative member of the award winning Stuck Pigs Squealing Theatre Company, his latest short film *Clown Story* is set to appear at this year's Sundance Film Festival. He made his London debut last month in *The Angels of Mon* at the White Bear Theatre.

Helen Bradbury

Strophe in *Phaedra's*

Love

This is Helen's third Sarah Kane role after appearing as C in Fail Better's *Crave* and performing a one-woman version of *4.48 Psychosis* at the University of Warwick where she is a student of Theatre and Performance Studies. She has played the title role in *Salome*; Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*; Frau Gabor in *Spring Awakening* and the Messenger in *Antigone*. She has recently directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and appeared in two short films (*Ladies* and *Hindsight*).

Jonathan Heron

Man 2 in *Phaedra's Love* / Associate in

Head

In addition to his directing experience, Jonathan has played a variety of roles including P.H. in the rehearsed reading of *Head*; the Lord Governor in *The Witch*; George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; Rumsay in *Silence*; Prospero in *The Tempest*; Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* and Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Ben Lambert

Hippolytus in *Phaedra's*

Love

Ben trained at Central School of Speech and Drama where he graduated this summer. Theatre there included *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which he played Oberon; *Love is disgusting. I'll take the yo-yo*, a devised play with Royal Court Director Jeanette Smith; *Absolute Hell* by Rodney Ackland and Sarah Kane's *Crave*. Ben is very pleased to be making his first Edinburgh Festival appearance.

Matthew Landers

Priest/Man 1 in *Phaedra's Love* / Urchin in

Head

After winning the Stage Scholarship to the Academy Drama School in London, Matthew trained at East 15 Acting School. Whilst there he played a wide variety of roles including the title role in *King Lear*; Lord Foppington in *The Relapse*; Sweets in *Mojo*; and Alfred the Horse in *Toad of Toad Hall*. These roles are Matthew's first since training and his first at Edinburgh.

Steph Potschke

Phaedra in *Phaedra's*

Love

Originally from Singapore, where she performed in numerous shows including *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Lettice and Lovage*, and *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Steph moved to England to study English and Theatre Studies at the University of Warwick. Recent roles have included the title role in *Anna Karenina*; Amoretta in *The Witch*; and Deborah in *A Kind of Alaska*.

Zoë Simon

Woman 1 in *Phaedra's Love* / Head in

Head

Zoë trained at the Drama Studio London and after graduating she wrote and performed in two plays at the White Bear: *The Daughter of Frankenstein* and *After Dark*. Other roles include Mia Wallace in *Pulp Fiction – Live*; Meg in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*; and readings for Artists Against the War: the title role in *Lysistrata* and the Shock and Awe series at The Cockpit Theatre. She devised and performed in Fail Better's *Echo and Narcissus* before beginning work on *Head* as their Associate Artist.

PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

Jonathan Heron - Director/Producer **(Artistic Director and Founder)**

Jonathan has a BA (Hons) English and Theatre Studies (First Class) from the University of Warwick and an MA Text and Performance Studies (Distinction) from RADA and King's College, London. His directing credits include: *Echo and Narcissus* (White Bear, London); *Diary of a Madman* (RADA in-house); *Crave* (The Underbelly, Edinburgh); *Macbeth* (The University of Warwick); *The Tempest* (Warwick Arts Centre); *Pinter Double Bill* (Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Play in English Festival, Bratislava, Slovakia, RSC Summerhouse); as well as extensive work on the drama of Samuel Beckett. His assistant directing credits include: *The Witch* (GBS, RADA) and Brit-Pol Theatre's *The Card Index* (White Bear and BAC). He has also worked with Northern Stage and Northern Broadsides. Jonathan also has experience of producing, dramaturgy and performance. He is about to undertake the PGCE in Drama at Middlesex University.

Nomi Everall – Designer **(Company Designer)**

Nomi has a BA (Hons) English and Theatre Studies (First Class) from the University of Warwick. Her design credits include *Henry V*, *The Tempest*, *Anna Karenina*, *City of Angels*, *The Last Days of Mankind* (all Warwick Arts Centre); *Crave* (The Underbelly, Edinburgh) and *Echo and Narcissus* (White Bear, London) for Fail Better. Nomi works as a freelance stage manager, illustrator, and scenic artist (*Dick Whittington*, *Norfolk's Rose*, *Much Ado About Shakespeare* – South Hill Park Arts Centre). She has recently toured with Trading Faces Theatre Company's *Creaking Shadows* and is currently training as a technician at The Pegasus Theatre, Oxford.

David Tanqueray - Production Manager **(Company Stage Manager)**

David graduates this year from the University of Warwick with an MEng in Mechanical Engineering. His roles within the university drama community have included Technical Director, Stage Manager, and Sound Designer of numerous productions at Warwick Arts Centre over four years including *Dystopia*, *The Tempest*, *West Side Story*, *Henry The Fifth* and *Company*. He has venue managed for the Pleasance at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2003 and twice for the National Student Drama Festival in 2003 and 2004. He currently works in a live music and club venue as a Crew-Chief and Stage Manager (credits here include *Fun Lovin' Criminals*, *Supergrass*, *Wheatus* and *Afrika Bambaataa*).

Ric Watts – Co-Producer **(Company Producer)**

Ric is currently the Producer and Artist Manager at Your Imagination, where he is producing new work by Ridiculusmus, Cartoon de Salvo, The Gogmagogs, Ralf Ralf and Kazuko Hohki, for venues such as the Barbican, Soho Theatre, and BAC. He has also just produced *This Way Up*, which tours work by five young companies to a consortium of regional venues including Warwick Arts Centre and Manchester Royal Exchange. He recently worked on BAC's *OctoberFest* 2003, alongside producing *Crave* and *Echo and Narcissus* for Fail Better. Ric has a BA (Hons) Theatre and Performance Studies (First Class) from the University of Warwick and an MA in Creative Producing from Central School of Speech and Drama.

Claire Hilton - Publicity Officer

Claire has just completed a BA(Hons) English and Theatre Studies at the University of Warwick. Whilst there she directed a production of *City of Angels*, stage-managed *Guys and Dolls* (both WAC) and organised the first ever Drama Ball. She has performed at the Swan, Stratford-Upon-Avon and worked at the Haymarket Theatre, Basingstoke.

fail better

PRODUCTIONS

A HISTORY

- **The company was founded in 2001 at Warwick University with a Pinter Double Bill** (A Kind of Alaska and Silence).

This production opened at the Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff in May of that year and closed at the RSC Summerhouse, Stratford-Upon-Avon in June. During Spring 2001, we also **represented Britain at the Play in English Festival in Bratislava**, Slovakia. Our Pinter Double Bill played to a packed house on the festival's closing night and was attended by the British Ambassador.

- **In August 2002, our production of Sarah Kane's *Crave* was a sell-out success at The Underbelly.**

The show was also a critical success, receiving four star reviews from The Scotsman ('gut-wrenchingly effective'), The Herald ('delivered with well-drilled commitment'), Fest ('**timeless and achingly human**') and The List ('a diamond of a show'). We were also subject of an Institute of Ideas panel discussion where the production was described as the best since the original.



Helen Bradbury as C in *Crave*

- **Fail Better moved to London later that year and in April 2003 began working with a new ensemble on Ovid's *Echo and Narcissus* and plays by Samuel Beckett.**



Antonio De Gregorio and Finnian O'Neill
in *Echo and Narcissus*

In Summer 2003, the devised work **Echo and Narcissus** ran for three weeks at the White Bear Theatre, Kennington to critical success: '**It is challenging, gripping, creative and the acting is assured.**' (The Stage) 'A short visually arresting piece that'll have you scurrying back to your Ovid.' (Time Out)

- **We returned to the White Bear in November 2003 for a rehearsed reading of *Head* by Associate Artist Zoë Simon.**

SARAH KANE

Each play was a new step on an artistic journey in which Kane mapped the darkest and most unforgiving internal landscapes: landscapes of violation, of loneliness, of power, of mental collapse and, most consistently, the landscape of love.

(David Greig, Introduction to *The Complete Plays*)

Born in Essex in 1971, Sarah Kane is now considered by some as one of the greatest playwrights of the 20th century. Throughout her adolescence Kane developed a strong interest in the theatre and she later went on to study at Bristol and Birmingham universities, fuelled by the desire to become an actress.

It was at university that her talent as a playwright was realised and during her time at Birmingham, Kane started work on her first play *Blasted*. Kane's theatrically stunning play of violence, love, and the conflict between reality and perception was first premiered as a student's end of year piece. Impressed by Kane's fresh ingenuity the Royal Court Theatre allowed Kane's her theatrical debut in the Theatre Upstairs in 1995. Critical uproar followed the first performance of *Blasted* concerning the violent confrontational nature of the piece. Whilst some critics dismissed the piece as gratuitous others embraced Kane's exploration of the theatrical world.

The following year the Gate Theatre commissioned Kane to write *Phaedra's Love*, a reworking of the Greek myth of a love between Phaedra and her stepson Hippolytus. This gripping tale of unrequited love and sexual desire is one of Kane's least performed plays and yet remains one of her most beautifully crafted pieces. Then followed Kane's daring third play *Cleansed* - a poetic drama on modern themes. With *Crave* she turned, like Beckett before her, into the internal world of her protagonists and challenging theatrical form. **4.48 Psychosis** continued this desperate quest into the heart of despair.

Throughout her life, Kane battled against severe depression and on numerous occasions checked herself in to Maudsley Hospital. In February 1999 Sarah Kane took an overdose of sleeping pills, she was rushed to hospital by her friends and revived. Two days later Kane was found hanging in a bathroom in London King's College Hospital.

Kane's work is now considered an integral part of what Sierz labels "in yer face theatre". Her attempts to cry out to an audience, once criticised, are now praised for their ingenuity. Kane's work is studied worldwide in schools and universities and even though her plays have achieved such academic status, her words still remain as alive today as in the first performance.

1971 Sarah Kane was born in Essex.

1995 *Blasted* first performed

1996 *Phaedra's love* first performed

1997 *Skin* first released (film broadcast on channel 4)

1998 *Cleansed* first performed

1998 *Crave* first performed

1999 Died aged 28

2000 *4.48 Psychosis* first performed

THOUGHTS BEHIND HEAD BY ZOË SIMON

Our city is teeming with individuals living out their own extraordinary internal drama. The thought ricocheted round my head, beginning to form into what is now a play called *Head*.

I thought of the three urn-imprisoned characters in Beckett's *Play*, but as I thought about them it was as if the stage were suddenly extended to reveal a whole landscape of chattering individuals.

They were chattering because we reduce everything to our emotions. Eventually. Ourselves, other people, our surroundings. That's why we break down. And when we break down that's what we break down to. Whatever the time or place, I've always had the sense that our emotions catch up with us in the end.

I'm fascinated by the emotions that are big enough to exclude everything else that make up the 'theatre of the extreme', informing my favourite playwrights: Beckett, Kane and the Greek Tragedians. I think dramatists who mine these emotions harness the true power of theatre.

When I go to the theatre I want to be terrified by the characters' nakedness and moved by their efforts to overcome it.

Emotions make up who we are, we always return to them, but we are seldom advised to see our identity in these terms. The organised, rational world of party politics works by enticing us to believe in an abstract, desirable society. It works by making us want something outside ourselves, rather than wanting to live in a way that allows us to be us.

I became aware of this tension in one of many forays into politics, which always culminate in me feeling apathetic. I couldn't shake the sense that I cared about what I cared about because of who I was, and what had happened to me. Politics couldn't explain either of these things. Whatever society politicians devise and succeed in creating, they are merely super-imposing it on the urn-filled, Beckettian landscape.

I wanted to explore this tension in a play because young people are said to be utterly disinterested in politics. Also because I think our reasons for not being interested are so simple: politics doesn't explain who we are.

The character *Head* is totally unaware of this tension, she's governed by the emotions that the terrible and disappointing things that have happened to her have produced. **Head's emotions force their way through, mutilating the landscape like the Rothko cut that cleaves the canvas.** They also determine the future of the other characters in the play, Urchin and P.H, driving her to wreak violence upon both.

Head has a compulsion to tell about the terrible feelings inside her. It is the compulsion of the damaged and depressed, which makes a person want to cut themselves to show what's inside, but then cover the cut because what's inside is so painful. **The compulsion that longs to find some sense in telling, but never can, so tells again.**



Although *Head* is a violent and extraordinary character, I think as with other tragic figures, she's attractive because there's an incredible purity in her refusal to let go of, and inability to let go of 'what's in my head'. It makes her the purest form of all the flawed character traits that we recognise as human when we go to the theatre.

My work as an actress and playwright is informed by depression and emotional trauma. I find a beauty in its impossibility. I've found the desire to express what I have felt a great creative

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force, hence Head's outpouring and love of 'words'. I have experienced depression on and off from the age of fourteen, and suffered a particularly dark period when I went to study at Oxford as did my friends, several of whom were sectioned, and taken off to the local mental hospital, a gloomy, foreboding building. It struck me then that so many people have an impossible drama going on beneath their skin, and a whole world inside their head.

One of the things that strikes me most about *Head* is how relevant it is to what young people are going through, both *Head* and *Urchin* are crushed by the weight of expectations of the adult world upon them and they are cut off from mainstream politics. The media and politicians rate young people on the basis of what qualifications they have, and whether or not they have succeeded in school. *Head* and *Urchin* are struggling to find an identity outside this.

Head is dogged with depression, she 'drags knives across' or self-harms when she feels hopeless, and there is disturbing evidence that self-harm is reaching epidemic proportions among young people.

Head and *Urchin* are living out a very bleak existence on a sink estate in South London, which is overrun with drugs and violence, and *Head*'s Dad has a chronic alcohol problem. In this respect they are no different to a lot of other young people, and **they represent the hidden voices of the destitute young all over Britain.**



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Warwick University Drama Society



W.U.D.S presents a diverse programme of theatre throughout the year, from Pinter to Kane, Shakespeare to physical theatre. We offer our members the chance to act, direct, produce and tech in professional theatre spaces, as well as arranging theatre trips, socials and workshops with professional companies.

We also thank our Friends and Patrons for their generous support.