

# A Report For Palatine on the Creation of two DVD ROM Documentations on Clive Barker and Phelim McDermott

## Background to the Project

In April 1988 Nigel Jamieson launched the first International Workshop Festival. His introduction to the programme declared that it would 'be one of the most extraordinary gatherings of top international teachers ever held under one roof, offering workshops for over 200 people at any one time.'<sup>1</sup> With a surrounding programme of warm-ups and wind-downs, exhibitions and film screenings it had all the bustle of a festival. He announced his policy unflinchingly:

Behind the festival lies the belief that if theatre is to play a vibrant role in our society then we must train our performers in a wider range of disciplines, drawing on the roots of theatre and reflecting the multi-cultural society that we live in. The Festival aims to be a spectacular opening fanfare in a campaign to draw attention to this pressing need. Where are our training schools in these fields? The actor wishing to study primarily text-based theatre has a wide range of establishments to choose from and the opportunity of Education Authority Grants. In contrast the physical performer must pay for his own piecemeal education, and usually travel abroad to get it. The time for change has arrived.<sup>2</sup>

In 1993 I was appointed Director of IWF and continued with his policy of organising workshops that would both fuel and challenge the practice of British performers. However, apart from the workshops, warm-ups and wind-downs, and the discussions I felt that one element was missing from this crucial service to the profession – Documentations of this work. Happily in that same year I was introduced to Peter Hulton, Director of the Arts Documentation Unit, and whose work began in 1975 with the first edition of *Theatre Papers* (produced in Dartington College) and now continues with his *Arts Archives*. I invited him to join IWF as our Director of Documentation and in 1994 he began to create the first video documentations of certain of our workshops, and by the time we both left IWF in 2001, 42 were listed in successive editions of the Arts Archives.

1997 marked a watershed – or crisis, depending on how you look at it – in our documentations. Peter's analogue camera was falling off its last legs, and without new equipment the project would come to an end. In February we met in his kitchen

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<sup>1</sup> Nigel Jamieson, Brochure for the first International Workshop Festival (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Jamieson, 1988 Brochure.

in Exeter and made an application to the Arts Council of England's capital lottery fund – not only for a digital camera, but also for the hardware to create CD ROMs. By autumn we had received the money and purchased the equipment and began to plan this new form of documentation. Whereas a video documentation can capture important moments from a workshop that reveal the pedagogy of a particular teacher, a CD ROM allows for a much more layered reflection on that teaching. We proposed to examine the work of leading practitioners in the field of performance through the detailed study of a number of exercises that are central to their method, *and how they teach them*. We were equally interested in the structure of the exercises *and* the way that the teacher uses them as a point of mediation between him/herself and the student.

In terms of a division of labour, Peter films the workshops and edits of the footage. Not only has he had years more experience behind the camera; he has also been teaching drama and performance for the past 35 years. This means that he looks at the workshop with the eye of a teacher and knows where to find the significant detail in any exercise. This is even more the case in his editing: in none of the 42 videos and 6 CD/DVD ROM documentations has a teacher ever questioned his selection of materials – he always seems to be able to find the most telling moments or exercise in any workshop. Since I was the person who programmed the workshops and had a closer working relationship with the individual artists it was appropriate that I should conduct the interviews and gather archival material. Very simply, Peter does the pictures and I do the words.

It took us three years to start producing our first CD ROMs and in 2000 we published two: the first was on one of Tadeusz Kantor's leading actresses – Zofia Kalinska; the other on a remarkable Serbian director and teacher called Mladen Materic (who had already been the subject of a video documentation), director of the now Toulouse-based company, Tattoo Theatre. Peter had customised *Macromedia* authoring software such that on the right hand side of the screen there was a video feed, and on the left there were a series of titles, each with a time-code. So when, for example, you get three minutes and thirty seconds into the video and Materic starts talking about Impulse and Response, you notice that there is title in the column to the left of the video that reads: 'Impulse and Response, 3' 30". If you click on this title the text appears in the left-hand side column. In this way you can read these reflections of the teacher about terms, principles, themes, preoccupations and influences in their teaching.

The texts in the left-hand column consisted, in the most part, of transcriptions of interviews that I had conducted with Kalinska and Materic, but also included relevant materials gathered from their archives. In these first two CD ROMs there were not a

great many texts and other materials. With our second and third CD ROMs - on French teacher/dancer/choreographer Dominique Dupuy, and Claire Heggen a teacher and performer and co-director of Théâtre du Mouvement - things changed dramatically. Firstly, Peter suggested that I do not conduct an interview with prepared questions about the video, since this could easily influence their response to the footage. Rather, he proposed that I show the video footage that he had edited from their workshops and that I would record their unprompted responses. Understandably, their first response was to protest that they couldn't expound all their thoughts about teaching and pedagogy based on these forty minutes of film! Only after a third viewing did they start seeing how they could use moments and phrases in the recorded workshop to discuss wider issues that they provoked. Rather than taking place over two or three days, as with the first two CD ROMs, the process of information gathering for the second two was spread over fifteen months. The result was a much longer text, and a product over which the artists felt a much greater ownership - altogether a more personal project. Their reflections constitute a sustained reflection on their practice as teachers.

Peter captured the quality of this next generation of CD-ROMs in his introduction to Dominique Dupuy's.

This CD-ROM has been designed with a desk-top computer study environment in mind. It is for this reason that we recommend the use of ear-phones as these bring the viewer/reader into a more ambient relationship with the material. You will notice that you will have the opportunity to view visual material, hear commentary, read texts (as well as copy them) and write your own notes. The video stream may be paused at any point. You can also continue to play the video stream whilst opening up other pages or making notes. We believe that this kind of perceptual and conceptual journeying offers new opportunities to attend to the material under consideration and to allow for different elements to come together. We have, however, found it best not to proceed through the CD-ROM too quickly but to allow space and time for such connections to occur. One way of putting it, is to say that this CD-ROM has been designed as a site for reflection - a house into which one enters, with different parts to it, each having the presence of the person who lives in them. The word ecology has its roots in the Greek word "Oikos" (house). An ecology then, in this case, of Dupuy's relationship with the baton.

### **Clive Barker and Phelim McDermott**

The two DVD ROM documentations of Phelim McDermott and Clive Barker mark a further development in this form of documentation. Firstly, the expanded memory of the DVD format allows for considerably longer video footage than the 45 minutes of the CD ROM. Secondly, the experience of documenting Dupuy and Heggen had given us confidence to develop our more searching approach to the commentary on the footage. Each one took many months of interviewing and transcription.

If Clive Barker's DVD ROM was a reflection on his long and productive life as a teacher, Phelim McDermott's was his first attempt to give form to his thoughts about teaching. I am sure that Clive accepted the invitation because he knew that this was an opportunity to leave a lasting legacy, and equally sure that Phelim felt that he was now ready to come to some first conclusions about his teaching. This sense of beginning and ending colours both DVDs, and the way that I conducted the interviews. Another important factor in the whole process was that I had known Clive and Phelim for many years, and had been a colleague and assistant of Clive since 1985. I would argue that in order to succeed in creating a DVD ROM documentation you have to have a sympathy for, maybe even an engagement in, that person's work. Although at one level I was simply a secretary to their words, there were some moments when I had to encourage (a role that oscillates between being an explicitly partisan apologist, and a coach cheering on his athlete), and others where I had to goad and cajole Clive and Phelim into digging deeper or going further into their thoughts and ideas. It can be an exhausting process, precisely because I had set myself the aim of offering an exhaustive account of their work.

Socrates described himself as a midwife to other people's ideas. The dialogue that exists between documenter and subject is certainly obstetric, though usually with less screaming out loud (it happens inside our respective heads). Over the course of the six CD/ DVD ROMs documentations that we have produced, I have felt a growing feeling of engagement with the work, and these last two are certainly the most personal documents yet. But when all's said and done this is the teacher's and not the documenter's baby: they put their name to it, and hold copyright over it. Therefore, however much investment I have in the project, my job is always to assist and enable the teacher to give the fullest expression to their thoughts.

### **Clive Barker**

In some ways Clive Barker had already predicted the format for these multi-layered documentations. After watching the video documentation of his 1996 workshop on Theatre Games, he commented that it was all very well to show what he had done with that particular group of participants, but the viewer would never know what he was thinking about whilst leading the workshop. Happily, this DVD allows us to read this past-master of theatre practice share his thoughts about what he saw and what he might have been thinking when he was at work on the studio floor. While the workshop itself took place in 2001, the commentary was recorded over the course of 2004. In the interval between the workshop and the commentary Clive had suffered a major stroke whilst undergoing a triple by-pass operation. His recovery took over a year but by July 2004 he was back in harness leading a workshop at the National

Association of Youth Theatre's Summer Gathering, *The Big Bash*. Only a few weeks after I had finished transcribing our last interview Clive died on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2005. In addition to the transcribed interviews I have also included articles about actor training and related topics that he had written in the Theatre Quarterly and New Theatre Quarterly. Clive was proud of this DVD ROM and felt that it had given him a chance to reflect on a method that had been evolving for some forty years. One day when watching the final exercise he leaned over his shoulder and said, 'Well at least there's one thing that I know I can do, and that's read movement.'

### **Phelim McDermott**

It isn't usual for us to document the work of such a comparatively young artist as Phelim, but his method is as mature as that of any old master. Because I had commissioned him to lead two workshops on theatre space – one for IWF in 2001 and the other for CircElation in 2004, we had a fantastic opportunity to select four exercises and see how they were played by two completely differently groups of performers. In a sense this documentation is a reflection upon five years of teaching: from the first workshop in September 2001 to the last interview that I conducted with Phelim in November 2005.

This was, as I said above, Phelim's first attempt to give a comprehensive overview of his work. The result was a series of interviews that took place between January and November 2005, and the longest text that we have ever produced in any documentation – some 87 pages of single-space text in Arial 11-point. This wouldn't have been possible had Phelim not received a grant from NESTA which had given him time to reflection on his practice, how it evolved and what it involves. In this case we were simply lucky to find a subject who was ripe for documenting.

The structure of the texts betrays a layered approach to his knowledge. The first layer consists of a transcription of the instructions that he gave during the two workshops (transcribed from the video footage), alongside which is his later commentary on the reactions of the participants to those instructions, and indeed the instructions themselves. This conversation with himself became ever more detailed as we progressed through the footage; thus in the Newspaper Exercise at the end of the footage the exchanges of Instruction and Commentary read more like a dialogue.

After this direct comment and instruction are two sets of more reflective texts, the first exploring five major Influences on his teaching, the second, on some of his abiding Preoccupations.

## **The Market for the DVD ROMs**

When one thinks about an Archive it is something or somewhere that the informed researcher will seek out and then explore. While I accept that archives have an undoubted value I do hope that these DVD ROMS will have a wider market than dedicated researchers of theatre and performance. I would hope that all those students of theatre and performers who are interested in the teaching of Clive Barker (his book *Theatre Games* is still a set-text for more drama courses) or in the work of Phelim McDermott might buy the DVD ROM. I mean by this, actors and directors working in the performing arts, alongside students and teachers in schools, universities and arts colleges. In order to reach a wider audience Phelim's DVD ROM will be advertised on the Improbable website and from February 2006 on my own website, [www.bodiesofknowledge.org](http://www.bodiesofknowledge.org), an online directory of international training opportunities for those working in the performing arts.

## **How might the DVD ROMs be used?**

Although both DVD ROMS do include a good few games and exercises, I hope they won't simply be used as rather elaborate 'How to...' manuals. Of course, teachers and workshop leaders will be interested in how these two great teachers lead some very well-known exercises, but I hope they will see just how inventively they are being used as a means of elucidating fundamental principles of performance which transcend any particular need. I can only echo Peter Hulton's text cited above when he writes about a DVD ROM being an environment for learning – where you can discover how the teaching of a simple exercise can draw in so many reflections upon practice; how there are so many layers of knowledge and wisdom beneath a simple instruction. In helping create these DVD ROMs it is this layering of practice (a depth that is historical and a breadth that is geographical) that has inspired me: one exercise can set up a series of resonances across the field of contemporary practice as well evoking the teaching of past masters both living or dead. I was touched and saddened to find how interested Phelim was in Clive's footage, as indeed Clive was in Phelim's. They never met in this life – only in the virtual space that these DVD ROMS open for all of us.

Dick McCaw, London 9<sup>th</sup> December 2005