



## Idle Motion's

# The Vanishing Horizon

## Education Pack

Idle Motion have been creating highly visual theatre since 2007. The company met at secondary school, producing A-level and GCSE pieces together. Since then they have worked collaboratively to devise their productions, embracing the unknown and using play, workshops and improvisation to form their ideas and pieces. Their commitment to watching and sharing theatre is essential to their work, as is the sense of enthusiasm and fun that remains a constant in their rehearsals.

They are based in London and Oxford and are working as Associate Artists at the New Diorama and Artists in Residence at The Oxford Playhouse. They are a small company with big ideas and a huge passion for creating exciting and beautiful new work.

### Activity:

- Discuss Idle Motion's style.
- List 3 other theatre practitioners or theatre companies who have a similar style.

### Prompts:

Visual, filmic, physical theatre, devised theatre, ensemble, use of light.

### Activity:

List 3 different images that are created through the use of suitcases.

Prompts: mini-bar, bi-plane, fridge.

## Inspirations for *The Vanishing Horizon*

*The Vanishing Horizon* has three main themes: travel, family ties and pioneering female pilots. Although much of our early inspiration came from the visual nature of travel and the bravery of the first female aviators, it also came from shared personal stories of our own families past. Here Paul Slater, our artistic director, shares one which formed some of his earliest ideas for the show:

When I was young I remember my great aunt giving me a penknife with an elephant on the handle she said it was from South Africa. When I was a little older I remember my mother telling me about how all her family were brought up in South Africa until the day when they decided to return to England with my great grandfather following a week later. He never showed. His absences forced my mother to ask many questions about the family she may have on distant shores and has always been a constant unknown in her life. This got me thinking about the desire to reinvent yourself, the want to disappear and the bravery or cowardice in simply vanishing. What if this was move was taken by a woman during the time of a male dominated world?

During our research and development we looked at early female aviators and came across many little known stories of their bravery.

### Aviatrix Timeline

- 1903: Aida de Acosta flies a dirigible from Paris to Bagatelle. The dirigible was designed by Alberto Santos-Dumont who also guided Aida on her journey from the ground riding a bicycles and using hand signals.
- In the same year the Wright brothers, whose designs were inspired by Dumont's work, flew the first fixed winged aircraft what we recognise as a plane in Kitty Hawke, America.
- 1920's: Flight became more commercialised and popular amongst the very rich and famous.
- 1928: Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. This came one year after the first man, her flying partner Charles Lindbergh.
- 1930s: Amy Johnson's attempt at beating Bert Hinkler's 1928 record of flying from England to Australia. From an unknown university graduate she became a celebrity across the world.
- 1936: Beryl Markham became the first woman to fly from the East to the West of the Atlantic.

- 1937: Amelia Earhart disappeared whilst flying to Howard's island. She has never been found.
- 1940's: Many aviatrixes served as part of the ATA in World War 2. They weren't allowed to fly in combat missions but flew for logistics missions instead.
- 1941: Amy Johnson was killed. After getting lost whilst flying she crashed into the Thames.
- 1986: Beryl Markham dies at the age of 83.

The first book we read and one which we found particularly useful was Beryl Markham's *West with the Night* (1942). Here is an extract which is in the play:

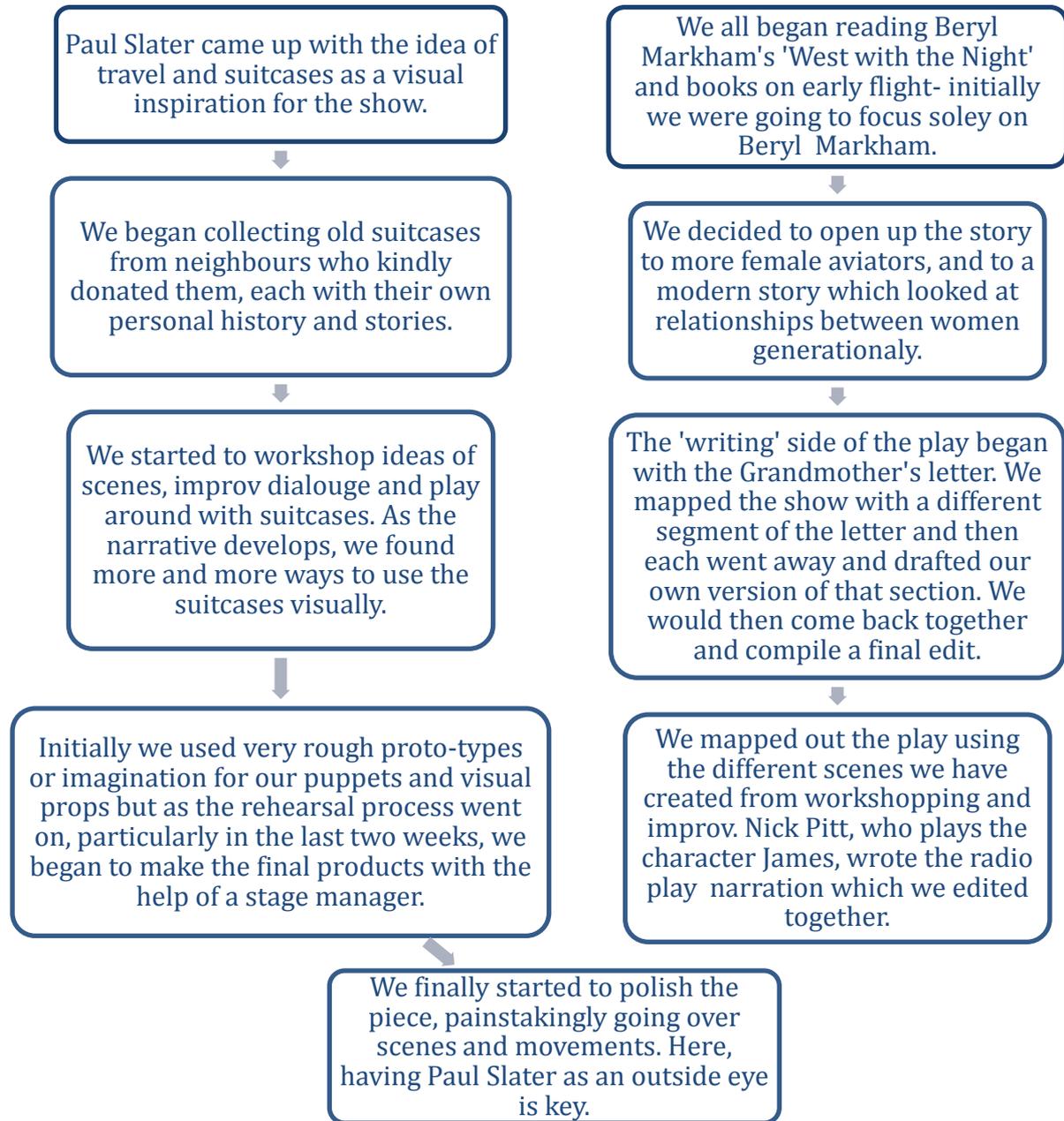
The world gets smaller as the light leaves it, there are no boundaries, no landmarks. They begin to disappear one by one, whisked away under the magical cloak of evening. One day the stars will be as familiar to each man as the hills on the road that lead to his door and one day, this will be an airborne life. After this era of great pilots is gone, man will have forgotten how to fly. The sky, the wind, the way of the weather will be promoted to familiarity with labeled buttons.

Activity: How were the characters of the female aviators distinguished from the other characters / ensemble.

Prompts: costume, props.

Our initial devising process for *The Vanishing Horizon* comprised of 6 weeks of rehearsal prior to its premier at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2010. Since then we have re-devised it before our 2011 tour for another 2 week period. However, we are constantly altering small details of the show whilst performing it to keep the show fresh.

Our Process:





### Character development of the Grandmother

Bring in an object that holds a lot of memories and is important to you, and is from a foreign country or holiday if possible.

Come and share it with the group, place it in the middle. Sit with the objects in the middle, and imagine that there is a person who owns these objects.

Who are they?

How do they own these objects?  
When would they have collected them?

What do they look like? How do you

### Airport character improvisation

The class line-up behind each other as 'the audience' in front of two chairs on stage. Label chairs A and B. The person sitting on chair B is not allowed to say anything and has to remain totally neutral. The person sitting on chair A has to improvise being the most annoying person to sit next to on an aeroplane. When the person on chair B feels like the others improvisation has gone on long enough/ is running out they get up and move to the back of the line. The person on chair A takes their turn on chair B and the person on the front of the line goes to sit on chair A.

### States of tension:

This is a technique which has been adapted from Jacque Le Coq's 'states of tension'.

All students lie on the floor, while the workshop leader talks them through the different states of tension.

- State 1= Like a new born baby, totally relaxed.
- State 2= Standing up but barely, just starting to take the 1<sup>st</sup> step, maybe start to explore surroundings, eventually starting to get to neutral
- State 3= neutral, no real expression, with each step become more neutral.
- State 4= up tension, become aware of people in the room, become more playful, start to really use the whole space
- State 5= business-like, determined, start to move around, with speed
- State 6= fear, taking over whole body right to the hands, finger tips etc
- State 7= complete and utter stress, as far as you can physically push it

Then walk around the space, and go through the different states of tension, in different orders.

How does it feel to move from state 1 to state 4?

Ask for a volunteer and assign them a state of tension, place them in an every-day setting of an airport and have them move around in that state of tension. Then bring in another volunteer, with the opposite state of tension.

Questions: 'whose he/she?' 'what can we tell from their physicality?'

Prompt: Le Coq spoke of always having a counter mask (opposite.)

Add in another two pupils, giving them different states of tension, allow them to play around. Now act as if your flight has been delayed.

Questions: What worked with that? What did you notice in the tension? Where did you see this in *The Vanishing Horizon*.

Prompts: Airport scene, contextualising a setting for the audience, recognizable characters.

# A Writing Scheme for 'The Vanishing Horizon'

## The Context

What did you watch, who was it by, where and when did you see it? What type of theatre did you see it in? What defines Idle Motion's style? What did this add to the actor audience relationship? What narratives did the play follow? How were these stories linked to each other and linked to a theme of the play? What was the effect of having an actor in the audience?

## **Analysing the tones created by the piece**

Describe **two contrasting** moments in the play. How was it engaging? Was it a comic moment? If so, how did they create the comedy? A touching moment ... how did they make it touching? Or a sad moment... how did they make it sad? What Images were powerful? How were these created? How did the actors respond to each other? How did they hold themselves physically? What was the emotional tone of their voice? Was there any subtext? Did they use pause or silence? What was their eye contact doing?

## **Analysing the Acting**

Which one of the actors impressed you the most? How did they show emotion? What did their character add to the narrative? What did they do physically and vocally? Did you empathise with them? Did they change character? How did they telegraph this to an audience? Were they funny? Awkward? Did you feel sorry for them? How did they do this? How did the actors work together as an Ensemble? Explain an Ensemble moment which really impressed you? How did they create tension in their voice? What did you read in their body language? Was there subtext used in the scene?

## **Analysing the Lighting and Sound**

How was lighting used to establish different places and locations? Was it warm or cold? Clinical or intimate? Describe how the lighting were small torches used by the actors in through out the plane (e.g. scene about the Grandmothers life/ on the aeroplane?) What effect did this have? What sound effects did the play use? What effect did this have? Describe how the actors brought the voiceovers of the Grandmothers letters alive?

## **Analysing the Set and props**

How were different suitcases used through out the play? How were different locations created, for example the hotel room, the airport waiting room, an aeroplane? How were long journeys shown? What did the feathers at the end of the play signify?

## **Final Thoughts**

What were your overall impressions of the play? What was it that engaged or did not engage you? Subtext?

## Idle Motion Workshops

Idle Motion also offer exciting workshops that use exercises we utilise in our creative process to help students explore imaginative and playful routes into the devising process. These work particularly well with students who have seen our work as it gives an insight into how we created our pieces and a chance to see where the exercises can lead, encouraging them to be more confident and creative theatre makers. In our workshops we draw on skills such as storytelling using verbatim text, puppetry, object manipulation and physical characterisation. We prefer not to work on a 'one workshop fits all' basis and therefore are happy to tailor around the current syllabus and the needs of the school or community groups we work with.

For more information on our workshops or anything else about Idle Motion's work please contact Sophie Cullen at [sophie@idlemotion.co.uk](mailto:sophie@idlemotion.co.uk) or 07939046156.



*Idle Motion's workshops were extremely well received by our students, who were stretched both creatively and technically by the work. The workshops were also superbly well delivered – purposeful, fun, engaging and inspiring. But above all, there is a clear understanding of what it is like to be a student. The workshop leaders are genuinely passionate about teaching and making theatre with young people.*

Gavin Henry, Head of Drama, Sevenoaks School

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