

# GRAVITY HOTEL

Coproduced by

**Downunder Mud Company, New Zealand and Pantheatre**

Special thanks to Liza Mayer, Linda Wise, Angelo de Bernardo, the SCI Malérargues, the Roy Hart Centre, Norbert and Christine Chautard.

With Sally Stockwell and Nigel Collins

Written by Sally Stockwell

Music composed and performed by Nigel Collins

Directed by Enrique Pardo

Assistants : Marta Cenedese and Brenda Armendia

## Résumé en français

Une femme se réveille dans le hall d'un grand hôtel délabré qui s'enfonce lentement mais inexorablement dans les sables mouvants de nulle part. Elle ne sait pas trop comment elle en est arrivée là ni comment s'en sortir ; tout ce qu'elle sait, c'est qu'elle doit écrire elle-même sa propre sortie. Ses seuls instruments de navigation sont une machine à écrire et les clients de l'hôtel, une collection d'étranges personnages apparemment peu fiables.

## Director's Notes

Sally Stockwell and I met in 1994 in Wellington, New Zealand. She was studying at the Aetaroa Drama School, probably the most mature and gifted actress that year. She then came to Paris to the 2000 Pantheatre professional workshop. Last summer on a working visit to Malérargues she asked me to direct a play she was writing. We elaborated the 'deal' by email. She expressed one clear concern: that I would deconstruct her play beyond story recognition, knowing that I tend to work very close to what is called today non-narrative theatre. Could we reconcile the "popular" expectations of story recognition with the 'elitist' ambitions of non-narrative theatre? I liked the challenge and signed the contact.

But then I was quite surprised when I received the play: very interesting playwrighting, but not really what I would call story writing – more of a situationist surrealist montage – and not that far down my street! The author and style that came to mind was Bruno Shultz (Kafka's nephew of sorts); the intellectual references I associated it with were "The Secret Life of Puppets" by Victoria Nelson, and Adriana Cavarero "Relating Narratives" (both high priorities on Pantheatre's reading list.) I knew my task would be easier than I first thought – and it was, and pleasurable too! The artistic complicity between author, actors, musician and director immediately took flight, calling in Psyche's touch. (A big plus : both Sally and Nigel arrived with the material ready: text, musics, costumes, ideas for the setting and, very important, having worked the characters – and engaged the work with utter professionalism.)

Gravity Hotel has some twelve characters, on paper: the central Woman (named Esther towards the end), various cameo ladies, The Girl Down the Well, Trudi, Belle, Lucille; there are references and apparitions by Grace Cash, by Walter, and by three or four male characters. But there are only two actors, one of them The Musician; he becomes a character layer of all the male characters – yes, even the hotel receptionist plays the piano! In a film production you would simply lay the make-up thick and use transformism, or hire extras, like the grandmother – and end up with what I call rational fiction, realistic dreams that everyone can so-called

follow. Sorry - I seem to have a tooth ("une dent" as the French say) against cinema at the moment... I get total artistic claustrophobia in those flat-screen dark dream-halls!

But back to narration and to Psyche's touch. Much as I admire Romeo Castellucci's work I cannot give up language to the degree he does - Castellucci being the epitome of what is called today non-narrative theatre. So I end up with something like non-narrative narration, or narrative non-narration – impossible labels, obviously. Plus I seem to want to navigate in search of reconciliation zones, dream territories where there can be a full interplay between image and language, emotion and discourse, voice and ideas. On top of all this, Gravity Hotel is quite verbose, at least by my usual standards (twelve pages ! I usually work with five or six.)

I hope you see and hear how often Gravity Hotel is "graced" with Psyche's touch. Here is what I mean: Psyche gives us our models of exchange (we also use words like relationship, affect, consciousness, or even soul...) The current historical term tends to be quite simply: "psychology" – originally, the logos of Psyche: her discourse, her moves, her voice in the broadest poetical sense. Psychology is a term we need to keep "revisioning" not to let it be kidnapped by reductivist schools asking for linear explanations. So, welcome to Gravity Hotel, welcome to the theatre of Psyche !

To be militant : Psyche manifests herself first and foremost in **moves and moods** – which is where texts and ideas come to life – otherwise we stay in literature. Moves and moods personified are ghosts, desires, fears, imps, angels, spirits: Psyche's court. The art is in the "figuring out" and in the handling of those creatures, the art is in the quality of **tact and tone**. Not just *presence* (the magnificence of being there), not just *presence of mind* (intelligence and culture) but finally *presence of spirits* – yes, spiritism, pre and post-contemporary psychology.

The story in such a perspective is made of many stories: clusters, series, odd apparitions, recurring obsessions, collections... in other words, **images**. "The image is the story" was one of archetypal psychology's early mottos

June 29, 2008

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(James Hillman and David Miller.) Every mood and move of Psyche's yields an image-story, which is often at odds with the spoken text, or with the music. We, as spectators, have to work out the contradictions. In choreographic theatre, glory, humour and tragedy all dwell in paradox – much like life itself.

My gratitude and congratulations to Sally and Nigel; the four weeks sojourn setting up the spiritist dilapidation of Gravity Hotel was a real pleasure. I hope the hotel keeps sinking into new depths in its journey downunder. Maybe it will come back to haunt us again. Bon voyage. EP

Producing **Gravity Hotel** here in France with Enrique Pardo marks a full circle for me in a creative journey. When I first encountered Enrique 12 years ago (thanks to Bert Van Dijk bringing him to New Zealand to direct his solo show), I was completely blown away by his theatrical approach and philosophy. I felt instinctively that following his (and Pantheatre's) work was the best thing I could do for myself as a performer.

Dipping in as much as I could with Enrique, Pantheatre and Roy Hart teachers over the last decade has provided real substance to work with, and carry back home to New Zealand.

It's a long way each time I make the journey but the rewards are always invaluable.

Choosing Enrique as the director for my first written theatre show was again, an instinctive choice; I thought my writing may be too dense for his liking and my demand for a clear narrative too confining for him. However, he took up the piece and the rest we flew into blindly.

I would like to express my immense appreciation to Enrique for his sensitivity to this work, his playfulness, his openness, and exquisite imaginings. Also, a huge thanks to his generosity, not only with direction, but also in the lending, bending, cutting and mending (of this and that), and for opening his and Linda's home to us over the last month.

I would also like to acknowledge Nigel Collins for his dedication and hard work on this show. He is an extremely generous and skilled actor and musician who has jumped on board with me and become my right arm. Without his dexterity, sensitivity, and silliness the show would not be what it is!

Without giving the story away, I'd like to note that strands of Gravity Hotel are inspired by a true story of my family ancestors.

We would like to thank the Roy Hart Centre and all its residents for their warmth and for opening this special place to us.

Thanks to Linda Wise for her generosity and especially Liza Mayer, for her hours of detailed care, thoughtfulness and support.

Also, many thanks to Marta Cenedese and Brenda Armendia for their many hours of work filming and assisting with this show.

We have had a very full and rich time working on **Gravity Hotel** and we look forward to taking it home to New Zealand and hopefully blowing people away.

**Gravity Hotel** would not be possible without the funding assistance of Creative New Zealand, the arts funding body of New Zealand.

Sally Stockwell.

Sally approached me with her idea for **Gravity Hotel** about three years ago. At that stage it was images and characters rather than a scripted story, but I was struck by the beautiful dream logic of the people she was describing and the depth of the world and its resonances. Also her courage in revealing a piece that was so personal to her - but with meaning within it which felt universal. I like universal. I like reaching people with a piece of work.

Sally had three songs which she wanted to include in the piece which we worked out for us to perform - these were the earliest ideas for music in the play and established an overall feel for the music.

Before we travelled to France I also spent some time with the script, at home with my piano and a mic - composing fragments which felt like they might fit with the world of the play. Mostly first takes - I like the roughness and immediacy of those first impulses.

During the rehearsals we listened to these fragments in the Orangerie - our venue which has become itself such an important character in the piece - and experimented with matching (or contradicting) scenes with music. Enrique also generously gave me the opportunity to compose as we improvised, and the live music is the current result of that.

It's been a challenge and a privilege to bring Sally's script to the stage in this first incarnation of **Gravity Hotel** - both she and Enrique have been fantastic to work with both as professional provocateurs and also friends to have a laugh with while we've been creating. It's got to be fun.

Arohanui (that means Big Love where we come from) to Enrique, Liza, Linda, Marta, Brenda, and the Lord God Almighty,

Nigel Collins.