**Liz Dorton – Joy Rummage - St Hughs Report Nov 2022**

Several artists from 12 to 65 years of age, came together for cake, musing (over what has activated any kind of Joy while buried in troubles and stress), and making puppets. These then joined with puppeteers (mostly people with some experience of theatre, including stilt walking, acting, and dance), and musicians, for several playtime sessions and a few public gigs.

**Making; May &June** ongoing.. Several making sessions with artists, experienced and amateur.

Puppets made included 2 giant snails, Green man, 2 giant foot/small hand body parts, 2 dancers, a handstand man, a giant egg, a roller creature, Saxophone man and more

**Playtimes; June/July,** with a bank of puppeteers and musicians; at Bransholme where puppets were made, 2 sessions at Shirethorn House-a large space with mirrors, and 1 semi public session outside, at Pearson Park in the bandstand –.

**August. 2 Paid Gigs;**

1. All day at **Northpoint** shopping centre , for Back to Ours, - amongst shoppers.

2. **West Park** outside near the play park, for 3 Ways East ;

**What did I enjoy;** working with 2 new musicians, both of whom adapted to the impro style very well. The percussionist was exceptional.

I enjoyed developing old stories and formulas, and trying out new ones, i.e. 3 puppeteers (incl a girl from the audience) copying a member of the audience in some yoga exercises.  A duet of swanny whistle and the rolling puppet, long line dancing with all the puppets with feet etc.

I enjoyed occasional interactions with the audience, some of whom tried out a puppet,  the new 6 legged trousers football game, and finally - puppeteers and musicians swapped places.

The sense of growing connections between us, and us and our puppet or instrument is very satisfying. It was good to involve Elijah Hembury and Ella Hardy(Photography) and Kieren Morris (football coach!).

lots of laughing.

**What did I learn**; more depths and quirks of character and movement possibilities of several puppets, through own practice and watching others. What looked good and what was a bit naff. Elijah turned out to be an asset as photographer who we may use in the future.

**What would I do differently;** More promotion of the event. We were somewhat stuck under the tree and could have moved about more, traveling around the park, the playground and even the nearby road.  Sometimes it must have seemed we were performing to ourselves. This is undoubtedly part of the remit - research and development of indoor and outdoor improvisation and experimentation, but we could have engaged with passers-by and the existing small audience even more, and I could have been more flexible with the stories and given formulas, allowing them to develop more.  The 2 hours was too long so energies flagged. -We should have had a longer break in the middle.

**Penultimate gathering** to assess where we are so far

**Notes from me;**

It has been fascinating exercise in curating an experience, a space and a range of happenings that consciously minimise **PRESSURE** and anxietyby;

-having a wide bank of artists, puppeteers, and musicians -you don’t HAVE to commit, or come to every session.

-cake and refreshments, integral hospitality, relaxed relationship/friendship, sharing before and after events.

-no official choreography, rather, playing with a puppet till characterisations, tricks, possible movements are internalised…..a build up of knowing the puppet well through own play and watching how others handle the same puppet.

-Reactive music and movement, **not rehearsal and performance**. i.e. A build-up of loose emotional storylines lead by musicians for puppets to respond to. A piece of dramatic music led by one musician for one puppet to respond to, or the other way round. A source such as a yoga teacher or human dancer that the puppets try to copy -with comedic effect.. A prop, such as a chair, balloon, ball, hat for puppets to react to.

**Notes from the others** it;

What is the vibe we are creating? Gentle play…picking up a puppet/instrument, exploring slowly, developing, feeling the space, building an idea that other puppeteers/musicians add to same puppet or bring in another puppet into the same story. Permission to play. Flow. Responding to each other…saying yes, giving it a go.

Interaction with the public has been fascinating, some great moments of real connection. The Bandstand playtime was a good balance of semi-public, performing to ourselves rather than an audience but drawing people in gradually from the outside, including children, families and people from different ethnicities. We have all learnt appropriate social distances with different age groups, how to invite or draw in without pressure, annoying, scaring off onlookers. This is helped by concentrating/looking at own puppet NOT the onlooker….looking ‘open’…not approaching audience but creating a welcome

Liked the puppets – colourful, flexible, indestructible, shining eyes, emotional

Musicians- have developed some close sympathetic musical connections while jamming

**November,** 4/11/2022 **Last Gig** at Wrecking Ball Arts Centre,.

This last gig at Wrecking Ball Arts centre was a great delight. Great venue, small but friendly audience, 5 puppeteers, 2 of which had not performed with these puppets in public before and one new musician (jazz piano, electronic sound effects, Jimbe drum and a short playlist).

1 new double puppet – 2 figures seamlessly joined at the wrists (no hands)

We decided to *really* take our time bringing each of the puppets alive, to concentrate on listening to/ loving the puppet into being and being extra aware of each other in duets and collaborations, incl. responding to the music or visa versa,- musician responding to puppet(s) movement…not to panic and rush, but, feel our way and love.

We created 3 clusters of 3-5 skits with breaks in between. In each section the audience were occasionally encouraged to join in to great effect incl.3 people telling a joint story (a sentence each) that we responded to, ending the evening with nearly everyone joining in, in a free for all dance.

Some very funny and very moving moments.

**Future;**

Collaborations; Puppets respond to other bands such Mambojambo

Try out the puppets in public spaces with street furniture or natural objects/textures - steps, bollards, benches, logs, long grass, fallen leaves etc

Apply for funding for more R&D, for training up existing and other puppeteers, and for gigs

Make more experimental puppets; puppets on stilts(one of the puppeteers runs a stilt walking company, Upper Level)

More separate exaggerated body parts -separate or composite body

More abstract, surreal body parts

A last Rummage this year for Christmas, to a group with Dementia, Butterfly Memory Loss group.