

Sarah Shorten



A life of three chapters, thus far...

- Everything I did before jumping into the dance world aged 29
- What I have learned and produced artistically before having children
- As above, but with a family in tow

Practice summary

- Movement manipulation and presence sit at the heart of what I do – there are no words or specific narratives to be understood. I have a desire for performance worlds to be felt as well as seen.
- I engage audiences in close proximity, increasingly experimenting with structures that “reduce the gap” between audience and performers (eg abandonment of traditional promenade or unbounded “hunt the action” models).
- I have developed methods to combine professionals and skilled child performers to broaden the possibilities of what can occur in site-work, which ought not to be largely devoid of children. I was lucky enough to use my own boys as guinea pigs.
- I am a lover of the work of Seppe Baeyens, with whom I conducted R&D at Ultima Vez’s studio in Brussels, and am deeply curious about the work of Kabinet K. In my early days, I was mentored by Maresa von Stockert – we rekindled this connection in 2017.

Education

1982-1989

Norwich High School for Girls
GCSEs and 4 A Levels

1989-1992

University College, Oxford University
BA Hons Geography (Class 1)

Timeline

1992 to 1998

- Cloud forest reforestation project work at Artemis and Genesis Cloud Forest Preserves in Costa Rica, followed by a stint in Valparaiso in Chile.
- Returned to join Berkshire Women's Aid running a refuge in Reading – shifted to Manchester supporting women with drug addictions.
- Whilst at a lecture about Dance Movement Therapy at the Laban Centre in 1999, I discovered my first edges of the dance world.

1999 to date

In 1999, I followed a mixed programme of intensive learning at Kensington & Chelsea College (Contemporary Dance), Surrey University (various MA Choreography modules under the steer of Emily Claid) and workshops/residencies in London and Berlin, learning as much and as quickly as I could.

Stacked Wonky was born in 2000.

I took a version of a break after a London burn-out in 2005, kids followed in 2006.

“Everything we do revolves around movement and site, buoyed up and inspired by a very strong group of performers, designers, musicians and makers of all sorts. Over the past 20 years we have been quietly making work/commissions for unusual places – Trafalgar Square, Clovelly Court Estate, Museum of Childhood etc, resurfacing in 2015 with “Liberator”, a box-set of four site episodes performed in the Vale of Porlock and “The Landings” in 2017, a performance journey accessed by walking the hinterland between Blue Anchor and Minehead.”

“Anarchic and exuberant, the movement she creates is beautiful,” say Time Out.

Although supported in the past by various organisations, such as Arts Council England, Greenwich & Docklands International Festival and Dance in Devon, more recently we have sought financial independence to test ideas without constraint. We understand this is a privileged position to occupy, thus have sought ways to share wealth in West Somerset, such as our Academy for Kids.”

Projects

London

- 2001/2003: site specific works for Lost Property Arts Collective – Camden Roundhouse Undercroft and the Barge House, Southbank
- 2003: “401 pieces” – our first major work for Tottenham Court Road's once iconic furniture store, Purves & Purves, funded by Arts & Business
- 2004/2005: “Square Dances” and “Say it Loud” commissioned by Greenwich & Docklands International Festival, both site works for Trafalgar Square
- 2005: English Folk Dance & Song Society – a year-long residency at Cecil Sharp House celebrated with “May Fete with a Twist” and an ACE funded site work for the House itself, “The Dream of the House in the House”, in partnership with the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain and The Society of Wonders
- 2005: V&A Museum of Childhood commission for Open House

South West

- 2004 to 2007: four successive years producing semi-professional performances in disused spaces (swimming pools, factories and markets) with a cohort of boys aged 8 to 14, commissioned by North Devon Theatres
- 2010: “Facing North” commissioned by North Devon AONB for Clovelly Court mansion and gardens
- 2012: “Exhale and Hold” commissioned by Dance in Devon for a series of water-related sites across Devon
- 2015: “Liberator”, a box-set of four site episodes performed in the Vale of Porlock
- 2016: “Where the Wild Things Are”, an anarchic, outdoor soft-play area for children inhabited by Wild Things, commissioned by Sapphire Festival, Porlock
- 2017: “The Landings”, a performance journey accessed by walking the coastal hinterland between Blue Anchor and Minehead towards dusk
- 2018: “For those who are not here are here” commissioned by Pavilion Dance South West and Activate for the Inside Out Festival in Boscombe
- 2018-2023: Ongoing partnership with the National Youth Dance Company sharing practice and performance
- 2021: “We come before you, to stand behind you”, almost but not another meeting in a village hall devised and delivered by Stacked Wonky’s Academy for Kids, which successfully toured Somerset in 2022/23 with support from Take Art’s Rural Touring Programme
- 2022: “4 Minutes”, a countdown duet for two 16-year-old boys, touring nationally via Dancing City at Greenwich & Docklands International Festival

Teaching

Dartington College and, subsequently, Falmouth University
BA Hons Dance & Choreography – 2nd and 3rd year site specific modules
2005 to 2008