



# Frantic Education

*Frantic Assembly's Lovesong has added another impressive educational pack to their bow, Jo Caird speaks to the frantically assembled team about why education is so important to their company*

**L**ovesong, the latest offering from acclaimed physical theatre company, Frantic Assembly, is the story of a couple at the beginning and the end of their life together. Young and old versions of the pair, played by Leanne Rowe and Edward Bennett, and Siân Phillips and Sam Cox respectively, inhabit the same space, not quite interacting with their other selves, but presenting an elegiac portrait of a love affair over many years.

## Reunited

The show sees Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett, Frantic Assembly's artistic directors, reunited with Abi Morgan, the BAFTA-winning writer they last worked with ten years ago on the 2001 play *Tiny*

*Dynamite*. It's a collaboration with which all three have been delighted to re-engage: 'I don't know if we really felt we had unfinished business with *Tiny Dynamite*', says Hoggett, 'but there's definitely residual of that way of thinking about theatre that we haven't done for the last ten years'. Graham agrees, remarking on the, 'shared notion of tenderness' in both parties' work and pointing out that despite the creative advances they've each made in the intervening years, 'something feels just as it always was'.

*Lovesong* has been touring since September and the show's reception, both critically and in terms of audience response, has been very positive. Available alongside the tour (bookable until February 2012), as a route into the show and Frantic's work

more generally, is a workshop that explores the devices and techniques used in the development of *Lovesong*. This too has been going down well, with Frantic receiving plenty of excellent feedback from schools that Krista Vuori, one of the company's creative learning practitioners, has visited.

## Educational core

The *Lovesong* workshop is the newest addition to Frantic's impressive education programme, which has included workshops on many of the company's past successes, such as last year's boxing-focused show, *Beautiful Burnout*, Frantic's electrifying take on *Othello*, and the company's collaboration with Mark Ravenhill, *pool (no water)*. Show resource packs for teachers and students

are available for free on Frantic's website, and the company also runs devising and physicality workshops all year round, as well as a training programme for professionals, graduates and young artists.

Education work has been integral to Frantic's ethos from the very beginning, Hoggett explains: 'Before we had a show, we were running workshops, as soon as we were inspired to get involved in theatre, we were attending workshops and applying what we learnt and adapting them and trying to teach them at the drama society that we formed. So the education part's always been massive and from that I think we built an audience.'

Graham and Hoggett launched the company in 1994, taking their first show, a physical theatre adaptation of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, to the Edinburgh Fringe that year. The work gathered momentum throughout the nineties, using Graham and Hoggett's trademark striking choreography to explore topics as broad as club culture (*Klub*), sex and performance (*Flesh*) and destructive friendships (*Sell Out*). During these years, the directors ran the company, toured, teched the shows, led all the workshops and performed in all their productions. For Hoggett, working in this way, 'made for some really nice pieces of work, but they kind of crashed from one moment to another in lots of ways because of the way in which they were created.'

## Development

In 2000, the pair began to take a step away from performance, in order to be able to devote more time to the ongoing development of the company and for the sake of the work itself. 'When you're responsible for [a show] purely from the outside', explains Hoggett, 'I think you care a bit more, you can see more, you can create more delicate moments, and I suppose the way in which the shows were structured became a bit more advanced.' It also means that they are no longer held back by their own limitations as performers, Graham adds, with the result that they can now be more ambitious when it comes to the work they create.

## Workshops

The workshop programme, however, remained firmly Graham and Hoggett's domain. 'For many, many years', says Graham, 'we did all the schools workshops. We didn't open it out to anybody because we felt it was so important to maintain a standard. I think that wasn't just an arrogance on our part, it was a fear that at least if we messed up, *we* messed up. We didn't want to put it on somebody else.'

Hoggett continues: 'I think it took us ten years to let go. It was ten years before we did a workshop without one of us in the room, which is a long time to hold onto something.'

These days, the school workshops are taken care of by the company's team of associate practitioners, 'once we did open it out, we were adamant that we weren't going to employ professional workshop leaders', says Graham – while the directors lead the public and professional development sessions. However, regular skill share evenings allow Graham and Hoggett to gather feedback from their associates, keep everyone's training up to date and design new workshops to reflect the changing needs of students and teachers.

## Curriculum recommended

In 2009 Frantic Assembly was recommended in AQA's AS/A2 drama and theatre studies syllabus, along with the likes of Complicité, Forced Entertainment, Kneehigh and Shared Experience. Alongside the successes of their shows – from the multiple awards they've received, to the prestigious collaborations they've been part

of – being recognised in this way means a great deal to the directors.

'It's just a lovely accolade', says Hoggett, 'and ultimately we'd love to see more work by practitioners that are making work in this way, where the elements that make a piece of theatre come together in a much more harmonious way and you give equal weight to movement and music and light and all those sorts of things. We're constantly surprised by the way in which the company is perceived and either loved or loathed: it's always a bit of a surprise.'

*Lovesong's* tour continues into the new year, playing at the Lyric Hammersmith, London (11-28 January 2012) and the Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow (7-11 February 2012).

For more information on the production and Frantic Assembly's education programme, visit [www.franticassembly.co.uk](http://www.franticassembly.co.uk). To read our review of *Lovesong* from Autumn 2 visit our blog: [www.teachingdramablog.wordpress.com/frantic-assembly-lovesong-review](http://www.teachingdramablog.wordpress.com/frantic-assembly-lovesong-review)

