

## The Sound World of *a little space*



Mind the Gap has been creating world-class theatre from its home in Bradford for over 30 years. The company has an internationally respected methodology and approach to its work and is considered a beacon for learning disability arts and artists; *a little space* is their first physical theatre production.

Founded in 2001, Gecko is an award-winning company, led by Artistic Director Amit Lahav. With an expanding ensemble of international performers and makers, they create work through collaboration, experimentation and play. Gecko shows are visceral, visual treats combining impressive technical design with striking physicality. *a little space* is their second associate production following on from the international success of *The Dreamer* in 2016.

Gecko has worked with composer Dave Price from their first show 18 years ago and he has developed an intimate relationship with the company and a working method which allowed him to create original music that perfectly suits the narrative and emotional tone of the show.

*a little space* has been designed to engage with audiences on an emotional level. In the show we explore universal human experiences with the ambition that each person's response to the show will be a personal one, linked to their own life's journey, and therefore different from the meaning drawn by each of the audience members around them.

The show has been created over two years and each element of the piece plays an important role. The Sound world of *a little space* contains a rich mixture of sourced music pertinent to the world of the production combined with a specially created recorded score.

*a little space* is set in an apartment block and follows the lives of five people exploring what happens when they connect and disconnect from each other whether through choice or through isolation. Drawing on the performers' own experiences, *a little space* is a powerful piece of physical theatre, which uses physicality, imagery, sound and lighting to tell the story.

The music in *a little space* explores characterisation and story development. In harmony with all the other elements of the production, the music also serves as a springboard for the audience's imagination.

Mumbles, murmurs and fragments of spoken language are used throughout the show but is not the main method of storytelling. Often words are muttered or sentences incomplete. Language becomes an equal layer of the soundscape with the intention of aiding the emotion of a scene rather than defining narrative or meaning.



Added to language is the use of breath, which is another integral element of Gecko shows. Breath offers a way for the performers to connect both to one another and to the choreography and acts as a universal form of communicating emotion – a guttural and instinctual human act. Language and breath both feature as recorded and live.

At the start of the show we see a mysterious character play a musical phrase on metal pipes that are part of the set. The idea here is to invite the audience into the world of our story and show them that this will be an unusual, entertaining and magical event. The pipes connect different rooms in the apartment block and the mysterious voice of one character is heard seemingly singing through them, inside the hidden infrastructure of the walls of the building and looking for a way into the story. There is a choral element to some of the music which ties in with the idea that the group of individuals onstage represent us all.

Some of the music has a particular playfulness which helps establish, for example the couple, Paul & Lorraine, as a happy couple. This music is developed and becomes more turbulent in further scenes as cracks in their relationship appear and are explored.

They both have a signature instrument associated with their character: Paul has a trumpet as

his sound because in one pivotal scene the iconic theme tune from the TV show *Coronation Street* is used, which in our story represents the theme of his addiction issues. The sound of the trumpet almost pulls him towards the TV and eventually into it!

Lorraine's sound is a saxophone played conventionally at first and then as she becomes more troubled, extended techniques such as multi-phonics are used. This is where several notes are played at once producing a strange, almost animal like vocal quality which can have the effect of feeling strange and unsettling.

Paul and Lorraine also have an optimistic theme which emerges as they work through their emotional journeys and find solace in nature together. Paul's sound world uses static and a huge collage of TV and film sounds to blur his reality and fantasy worlds. Lorraine's sounds are related to her anxiety and how nature helps her overcome it.

The music of the care-taker character, Alison, is made from metallic percussion instruments including vibraphone, dulcitone, bells and chimes with flute whistle tones and bowed musical saw giving an eerie and intriguing quality. She acts like the guardian angel of the building and the characters, so elemental contraction sounds - pipes, bricks, metal, electricity follow her through the story.

When the character singing in the pipes, Charlotte, appears, there is a scene with atmospheric vocal music based around recordings of her own voice with choral singing joining as the scene develops. Charlotte's sounds are related to her isolation in her own little world where singing is her only release.

JoAnne's music begins with a gentle harp melody describing her desire to move forwards in her life and strings playing soft harmonics to show her fragility. Her anxiety is represented by music in a constantly shifting time signature which never quite manages to settle. As she becomes more disturbed the music gathers momentum eventually taking off with overbearing, driving drums. JoAnne's sounds are related to her memories and how these are triggered when she moves into the building.

Later as JoAnne finds resolution her unsettled music finds a way to co-exist with its odd shifting time signatures and a beautiful euphoric flute solo describes her new-found happiness. There is a motif of a practical hand-held light which is used to represent inner-most thoughts and the true essence of the soul. Musically this is explored through harmonic overtone singing and drones.

In this type of performance style, where spoken language is not the main method of storytelling, music and sound become hugely expressive elements in how we interpret the narrative. Mark Melville, sound design, was integral to the devising process and worked in collaboration with the whole team, to develop sonic worlds for each character which could be used as creative narrative tools through the show.

We hope that you enjoy being immersed in the world of *a little space*. You can find the cast and some of the creative team after the show to ask any questions. You can also write to us at [arts@mind-the-gap.org.uk](mailto:arts@mind-the-gap.org.uk) [info@geckotheatre.com](mailto:info@geckotheatre.com)