

By Sara-Jane Arbury Composed by Sophie Cooper

A NOTE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

One of the greatest pleasures in my job is to bring together creative people from different practices, connect them with place and see what emerges. Despite lockdown, Return was no exception and it has been a delight to play midwife to the fresh born creativity that has arisen from the combined talents of poet Sara-Jane Arbury and composer Sophie Cooper.

This latest Feral digital commission from The Courtyard places the building itself centre stage and has been created to mark the reopening of the venue on its tentative steps out of lockdown into the brave new world. We wanted to bring the centre's identity to the fore by tipping our hats to past inhabitants and embracing those of the future as they come to life in the new experimental studio.

As Writer-in-Residence, the inimitable Sara-Jane is no stranger to Feral's site-responsive approach and following an initial collaboration earlier this year, it's been wonderful to further embed the remarkable Sophie Cooper. Sound has always been a key ingredient in Feral's output and Sophie's phenomenal ability to create design that springs from onsite field recordings roots her work in keen authenticity.

I applaud the courage of Ian Archer in offering Courtyard support to bring experimental, contemporary work to Hereford. This is a forward-thinking piece that celebrates everything that makes the venue unique. Return signals a new chapter in the venue's artistic identity and we look forward to further explorative adventures together in the future.

Estelle van Warmelo



PRODUCTION CREDITS

Artistic Director - Estelle van Warmelo Writer - Sara-Jane Arbury Composer - Sophie Cooper Voice Over - Madeleine MacMahon Sound technician - Tom Richards Marketing - Tom Eperjesi Admin - Chloe Bradman Finance - Jordan Todd Courtyard technician - Richard Loveridge

ABOUT THE WRITER

Sara-Jane Arbury is a writer, performer and tutor. An active advocate of live literature, she was Voices Off Director at Cheltenham Literature Festival and collaborates with many organisations including the BBC, Oxford University Press and the National Literacy Trust. She is especially interested in the intersection of poetry and theatre and is Writer-in-Residence for Feral Productions.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Sophie Cooper is a sound artist who Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (HCMF) refer to as "A crucial member of Yorkshire's far-reaching experimental music scene". Sophie's practice pivots around new presentations of acoustic instrumentation (primarily the trombone) with electronics, challenging conventions around composition, text placement and performance.

PART 1 - OUTSIDE / THE FOYER

We are outside

At a distance Ghosts in glass

Let's wave, look! Your twin waves back! Say hello! Feel your voice open your mouth, Hello Hello Hello Hello Your twin mimes the echo in time, Time Time Time Time Listen! The bell chimes, That's our cue

We've been away for too long, It's like we've put our coats on And never taken them off, We've been left out in the cold, We are the endings of stories not told...

Are you ready? Go on, beckon yourself in, The time has come to join your twin

Shake off the hum of houses, the drum of traffic, Let's play our Dream, explore our Adventure, be Together, *Open sesame* the glass door To a happy-go-lucky, harum-scarum, whirly-gig of voices!

Hi! How are you? Good, thanks! Hello, The Courtyard. Thank you for your call... Can I help you? Yes, please! Nice to see you again! You too! Would you like a programme? I'd like two, please! Who's next? Me! Would you like sprinkles with that? Oooo, yes please! How many tickets do you want? How many have you got left? Who? What? When? How? Why? Where? Questions hold hands with answers, The pulse to pulse of theatre, Every wall was built to hear, window to see, Stories have played out in all corners, I remember:

The alarm of someone pulling the wrong rope in the disabled loo, *Oops, sorry*! Groups rehearsing on the stairs, the balcony, *What's my cue*? While audience members exit in double entendres from *The Full Monty*, *Do you want to see it again? Pardon?*? The hub of Youth Theatre, the bub of Creative Ageing, Kids' parties, panto, dancers on the forecourt, Worlds colliding, generations engaging

Nature wants to join the cast, auditions for a bit part, I remember:

The characterful cat that walked right in, *I own the place* Wind making an entrance in the café, Over-acting like it was Lear's blasted heath, *Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!* Meetings held under drips drop-dropping from the roof, Puddles appeared like stage effects beside you, The sun floods the space with a hot wash of light, Like this building, I hold my memories tight...

Ladies and Gentlemen, please take your seats. The show will begin in 3 minutes.

Don't worry, you're with me, and my fun, For us the show has already begun...



PART 2 - THE GARRICK ROOM

Welcome, welcome

To the hustle room, the bustle room, The practice-makes-perfect room, The let's-try-it-once-more room, The must-learn-your-lines room, The don't-ever-give-up room

Ladies and gentlemen of the Company, This is your half hour call. Half an hour please. Thank you.

Our honeycomb room is built for the buzz, Chatter, laughter, anticipation, From upstage left to downstage right, Marked out in tape under your feet, The room needs us, lives for the movement Of bodies and voices, decisions and choices

Hey, there's a sprung dance floor! You can bounce up-and-down by the door!

Creativity begins here, seeded by Endless improvisation games, Grows bigger, develops stronger, Until the show is ready to burst, Enormous, like Audrey II, hungry for life, Onto the stage of the world – FEED ME!



Ladies and gentlemen of the Company, This is your quarter hour call. Fifteen minutes please. Thank you.

This room is designed for reflections, Swish back the curtains and look, There's no view except yourself, You will ignore the skylight, The world could be coming to an end But you won't notice it in here

Mirror, mirror on the wall, I am the fairest of them all

We watch ourselves rehearse To perfection, pull faces, growl, grumble, Tease ourselves into character, Dance silvery trails through the air, The room stores our adrenalin, edgy sweat, We flutter like the butterflies in our stomachs Away Away Away

Please close windows when leaving. In case of rain please close to an appropriate degree. The sign says all I want to say. I am a room that's here to stay.

Please, look after me.



PART 3 - THE OFFICE

The room is labelled **Administration** In bold black letters on the white page of the door, Clear, precise, straight to the point, Let's open it up like a box file...

It's stuffed full of:

conversations	
queries	
drawing pins	
pens	
photocopiers	
wires	

contracts long calls paperclips pencils scanners plugs

short calls folders computers shredders paper

emails

Words clip each other, fall over, stop, start, make themselves heard, We swerve like cars in Cairo chaos, but we make the magic happen, This is ground control, the fulcrum of the machine, a hotbed of data, We're here to cater for everyone's needs

The air fizzes with activity, electricity, technology, Every small space spills over with stationery, To you, it's a mess of madness — But to us, it's method, We can find every bill, receipt, invoice at a moment's notice, In fact, every moment's notice is filed in this drawer – here Sounds pass without a care in the world Through this unproofed room, Show relays, music rehearsals, choreography Mix with Hereford traffic on Edgar Street, The crowds at the football stadium, Hollering in unison at a PENALTY or GOAL Hereford FC Forever United! Or the families playing in their gardens On Moor Street, set in rectangular rows

We may be 'staff' when we're here But the cabinets and pinboards tell our stories, Pictures of the personal behind the professional, Fixed in our hearts with pins, magnets, Blu-Tack, The cats we love, the holidays we've had, Bali, Krakow, Greetings From Lynmouth, Wish you were here, wish you were here, wish you were here

When we close up, go home, give a goodbye wave, Our room breathes in the quiet, and presses SAVE

PART 4 - THE DRESSING ROOM

Another heavenly day. My opening line Said while Gazing at the zenith – typical Beckett, I'm starring as Winnie in Happy Days, a strange play, I spend the whole time on stage buried in sand, Uncomfortable, my legs go to sleep. The audience Will never know how much I suffer for my art, Or the hell of nerves, the stage fright.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Company, This is your five minute call. Five minutes please. Thank you.

I've sat in so many dressing rooms in my career, They're like churches to me, they have reverence, They are sacred spaces. I offer up a prayer That I will not forget my lines, that I will deliver A performance worthy of theatre. There's no colour In a dressing room, it's a blank canvas ready For the palette of the actor – costumes, flowers, Marking the identity of the temporary resident. Think about the players who have stood here, Pacing the floor in silent agitation, running Their lines over and over, or sat in stillness, Balancing their breathing, meditation, Haloed by lightbulbs around the mirror.

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I prepare with the stamina of an athlete, The drive of a fighter, the focus of a footballer, Stepping out in front of a crowd, our audience, The flare of lights, eyes of expectation fixed On you. Only you. This room is quiet now, But imagine the space brimming with noise, The Youth Theatre, hundreds marshalled From room to room with the precision Of a military operation, runners, chaperones, Quick-fire costume changes, girls and boys Falling over each other, the backstage drama —

Quiet please! You can be heard in the auditorium.

Try to keep a lid on it, hushing and shushing like steam Through the corridors, Girls, hold your tap shoes When you run down the concrete stairs, The audience will hear you, no sneak previews!

I sigh, this time is mine, I am inside myself, alone, Another play, Another heavenly day.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Company, This is your beginners call for Act 1. Act 1 beginners please. Thank you.

Ah, at last, the summons to take my role, Bless you, dressing room. Hold my heart, carry my soul.

PART 5 – THE AUDITORIUM

Standby please, LX Cue 1. Standing by. Thank you.

We wait in the wings, Set to step onto the stage, Break a leg, ready to fly

Lights dim to darkness, Non-natural night creeps in, We are silent as shadows

Standby please, Sound Cue 1. Standing by. Thank you.

400 people lessen to a whisper, The odd cough, a seat shuffle, Sweets unwrapped, ssssshhhh

A moment's shared stillness, The audience, the actors – Energy pulses, beat beat beat

Standby please, on flies for Cue 1. Standing by. Thank you. Thank you thank you thank you And we're off! The first foot treads, The opening line utters

The stage wakes to a new world! We're in a dream, on a journey together Through a controlled illusion of freedom

Show noise is contained noise, Steered noise, engineered noise, Managed by an unseen backstage crew

SILENCE IN THE CORRIDORS!! Please take care when closing doors. Only Nature takes no notice,

Plays a part that rumbles and mumbles, Howls and thunders, *I'm behind you*!! Rain fiddles on the roof

As the water table rises, Floods the orchestra pit, Makes the space beneath a bucket...

But we will play on, and on, Until the final curtain call And our life on the stage is done, then -

A crescendo of applause! BRAVO! WOW! The audience returns to the here and now, Our auditorium, the star turn, takes a bow...

PART 6 - THE ROOM OF FUTURES

Push Button to Open The future

This room is all about The future

It used to be an empty space, Known in a former life As 'the area above the foyer And box office'

Now, it is a Room, Created from the void With a door, floor, walls, ceiling, An exalted cube of heaven

Natural light takes centre stage, Three picture windows give way To Hereford, city sky, daily life, This is an experimental paradise,

The strange in the familiar, A pure room, fresh for new ideas, No before-thoughts or past activity — This is a blank place for possibilities

To play with each other, Make, invent, plan, initiate, A surreal location where Trees are your audience,

Always a standing ovation! A white wall, your horizon, infinite, This room can shape-shift From one idea to another:

Today it's a desert, or a mountain cave, Tomorrow we're hiding under your bed, There's a party in your head! Let's do the conga! In one ear and out the other!

We are outside We are inside At a distance

Close by Ghosts in glass

Reflections in glass

Push Button to Open The future...

A NOTE FROM THE COMPOSER

I met The Courtyard at the start of 2021. During this meeting, I listened to the building and the stories of the people of the current and past inhabitants. I imagined the journey through the front door, moved through each space and wondered what the building would sound like if it could sing. Sara-Jane wrote so beautifully about her own meeting with the space and I noticed where our experiences crossed over as well as where they were quite different.

My subsequent composition draws on all of this and sonically, I was able to articulate the personality of The Courtyard as I saw it. Buildings like this contain important histories and it's been a privilege to work on this project with Feral Productions.

Sophie Cooper

A NOTE FROM THE WRITER

The Courtyard is a place I have visited many times as a performer, workshop leader and audience member. But when I passed through the front door during lockdown for a socially-distanced, mask-wearing meeting with Estelle and Sophie at the beginning of this project, the building told a different story to me.

As we walked around, little details rose to the fore and made their mark - from backstage signs fixed on walls to holiday postcards stuck on filing cabinets to buckets placed strategically in the basement. Each room has its own proud character, heritage and memories, and I felt a sense of urgency from them, as if the rooms wanted to show us they were still here, ready and waiting for the time when they can - when we all can - return.

Sara-Jane Arbury



Connecting people with place through site specific production.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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