

Love's Body Rising | An Introduction to the Script

Damian Coleridge 2013

'Love's Body Rising' is one part of the 4 Mysteries Project which is a theatre project presently developing a fourfold take on the gospel. Four stylised, symbolic, very different performances are in development, which will be presented separately, then together over one day.

MAKING A STORY

'I don't think of the gospels as stories.' Many of us think this way and it's understandable because of their episodic structure and various long sections of talking etc. This sort of mix is unique to the gospels - pretty obviously so in John with its long speeches and curious structure - but it's not what we're used to in stories. However, understanding them as stories, and the development of story frameworks, is a useful way of entering them.

FRAMEWORK

The framework for the script is a story of transformation. Whatever doesn't sit within this framework of transformation is put to one side.

DESCRIPTION

A parade enters into the performance space. There follows the creation of a space which allows for transformation. Caught up in this the performers are transformed and begin to play out 5 stories of transformation - Eat Me!, The Wedding Feast, Crossing Over, Just Want to See His Face and Unnatural Birth - culminating in a dancing vision which gathers up all that has happened into a final transforming.

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation provides the framework and the focus. Jesus is transformed and we see from what to what. An audience is part of this transformation. In its re-creation of a new body it's a story of transformation quite unlike the ones we're used to e.g. A Midsummer's Night Dream, Ovid's Metamorphoses, The Incredible Hulk etc.

RIDDLE

This story of transformation is riddle like: how did we get from the 'once-and-always' Imagining, the vision at the beginning, to the risen body of Christ at the end? What is happening in the middle bit with Jesus? The central riddle of the cross – the tree of life - is found there, with each of the stories of transformation commenting on it, in interesting ways. There are two Riddlers who help us with this.

JESUS

- Jesus is the link from beginning to end even though he may not be in a scene. Through it all he is transformed and we see this happen.
- He's not the 'intensely self aware and divinely serene Jesus' who features in many a performance of John's gospel, nor the 'gravitas encrusted' Christ with an 'airless solemnity' who can be seen in many an old Hollywood movie and on a range of websites.
- He has the same appearance in each story he appears in.
- He is a masked and costumed figure in motion with other figures. The figure of Jesus then, in an important sense, is a design problem – dependent on the design of each episode and the overall design.
- In the gospel of John we have often asked the question 'do we include Jesus in the scene?' The answer being 'only if it's dramatically interesting.' So in performing the story of the blind man, Jesus isn't there, but through the testimony of the blind man he is there. That's the point of the story.

CHARACTERS

- Jesus is the link from beginning to end. His transformation is the key to it.
- There are a number of vivid, distinct characters in the 5 stories of transformation at the heart of the performance script. These include the man born blind and his parents, the woman at the well, Lazarus, Martha and Mary et al.
- 2 Riddlers play with the story so as to help an audience grasp what kind of story it is. As the story is a riddle, the Riddlers help us understand the implications of this, making use of riddles, sound effects and sounds etc. They wear multi-coloured jackets and act as MCs of a kind. They're not characters as such.
- 15+ performers are required at least 5 of whom constitute the LBR band.

DANCE & MOVEMENT

'Love's Body Rising' is a dance drama. It begins with a parade and ends with a dance. In between there is much movement and dance. The 5 central stories of transformation are 'choreographed', each in a different way. A choreographer is needed.

MUSIC

The music is eclectic and often live - there's an LBR band - and is heard everywhere through 'Love's Body Rising': in the beginning with its parade into the performing space, followed by the dance and movement and variety of songs through the 5 central stories of transformation, and again at the end with its wonderful dancing vision. It's not for nothing that the set is 'circus-like'.

MASK

'Love's Body Rising' is a mask dance drama in which all the characters are masked. A range of masks is used. Make-up too.

COSTUME

As with the performance, it's a mix of styles - brilliant, rich in detail.

SET

A 'circus-like' setting. A space that, once established, allows for transformation.

LANGUAGE

We choreographed scenes then began discovering the words for them. We have used a wide range of language resources.

STYLE

'Love's Body Rising' is a stylized, symbolic performance. Music, movement and design have an important part to play in this, as do the masks. It's a simple, exuberant, yet elegant dance drama with each story marked by a different style of performance. The use of commedia dell'arte in a story is one such style and draws attention to the differences; at the same time it suggests a playfulness and a bit of 'irreverence'. It's a reminder that naturalism doesn't work with John's gospel. This is why elements of physical theatre, contemporary circus and dance are part of the mix.

MYTH

Myth refers to the fact that Jesus' life doesn't end with death. 'Love's Body Rising' too is a mythic creation story, but unexpectedly so. Again, it's not a biography of Jesus, it's a story about 'one becoming many, and many becoming one, the fusion of a group and the risen Jesus in one body: the body of Christ then isn't a he, it's a he/we.' A new body. John's story of transformation gives a different insight into this creation of a new body and in doing so reminds us that all four gospels are necessary for an understanding of it. It's why we have a fourfold take on the gospel.

With the John we came to realise that if you have to simplify in order to focus on this body then that's what you do in order to make it real. A key question being, 'what actions will build the body?' (Again, this is where physical theatre, dance and contemporary circus come in.) It's an improvised re-creation. This re-creation story is the central myth that the mythic world of John's gospel feeds into.

STRUCTURE:

John focuses on the 'once and always' union - 'in the beginning ...' - which believers/performers are now part of as the risen, transformed body. This is why in 'Love's Body Rising' we start with the risen, transformed body and end with the 'once and always' union. In brief then 'Love's Body Rising' is five stories of transformation framed by a parade and setting up to begin with and a dancing vision to conclude.

If you're interested in the 'Love's Body Rising' script contact Damian Coleridge