



# ***Walking the Tightrope***

**Underbelly Topside, Potterow, Edinburgh, EH8 9BL**

**Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> – Monday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015 (not 17<sup>th</sup>), 3.35pm**

**Press Performance: Friday 7<sup>th</sup> August 2015, 3.35pm**

*Walking the Tightrope* is a selection of explosive, political short plays by stellar writers **Caryl Churchill, Ryan Craig, Tim Fountain, Omar El Khairy, Neil LaBute, Gbolahan Obisesan, Mark Ravenhill** and **Timberlake Wertenbaker**, exploring Freedom of Expression in the arts in the UK.

Written in response to issues of censorship and boycott that arose due to the cancellation of cultural events in 2014, including at the Barbican, Tricycle Theatre and Underbelly, these eight five-minute plays explore contrasting views on Freedom of Expression. A number of the plays previewed at Theatre Delicatessen, London, but *Walking the Tightrope*, as it will be seen in Edinburgh, is a world premiere of exciting new writing.

Director Cressida Brown comments, *Throughout this process I have genuinely felt as if I am walking a tightrope. Nerve-wracking questions have stayed unanswered: Should I censor a play about art censorship if it is offensive? How can I make sure we get a balanced set of opinions? Is it possible to take a neutral position in presenting these explosive plays? How can I get a debate going but avoid a backlash? How do I make sure I don't get anyone in trouble, including myself? The fact that freedom of expression seems so complicated to negotiate at the moment is exactly why I think we should raise it.*

After part 1 of *Walking the Tightrope* (the showing of all eight plays), there will be a panel discussion. Here, the audience responses are as important as the playwrights' opinions and the discussions in part 2 are geared towards replacing a fury of warring tweets with facilitated conversation. Topics will vary from boycotts and protests to social media and political responsibility. The invited panels will range from political pundits, journalists, leading artistic directors to academics.

*Walking the Tightrope* is production by Offstage Theatre and Underbelly Productions, in association with Theatre Uncut.

## Writers involved:

Ryan Craig: *It seemed to me that shutting down the work of any artist in an attempt to make the world a better place was an absurd and necessarily counterproductive idea. I wanted to show that in trying to dramatise complex and difficult ideas you have to reach deeper, you have to cross into enemy territory, you have to open your mind to philosophies you disagree with and the people who expound them. I thought the Tightrope concept was a good way to start exploring that idea because instead of trying to alienate or censor, it wanted to put many voices on stage together.*

Tim Fountain: *I think the issue of freedom of speech is one of the most important we face in this country right now. It's under assault from both Left and Right and it must be protected. Once given up rights are seldom regained.*

Omar El Khairy: *At times, particularly with spectacular moments of international crisis, our theatre community produces immediate, well-intentioned yet typically choreographed liberal responses. However, the spirit of Tightrope provokes a different kind of engagement with the world around us - one that questions and unsettles our assumedly shared humanism without simply relying on the exotification of cultural difference.*

Neil LaBute: *I'm hugely excited to be a part of Walking the Tightrope - a collection of short plays by a group of terrific writers about the freedom of expression. This theme has always been an important one in my own work and the form that is being used - the five minute play - is a wonderful and difficult one to master. If you care about humanity, then you care about the arts. If you care about the arts, you need to support this kind of work. In my mind, there is nothing that can't be said or seen on the stage. I think Walking the Tightrope intends to prove that many times over, five minutes at a time.*

Gbolahan Obisesan: *Heated debates can sometimes spawn self-righteous indignation as well as suffocating voices and the logic of arguments. The chance to write for 'walking the tightrope' felt like an opportunity to present a silenced and alternative perspective to an ongoing discussion.*

Timberlake Wertenbaker: *I think that some words should not be used but I'm not completely sure. The more I think about it the less sure I am. Words are all we have. Eliminating even a few of them may not be such a good thing. A group of playwrights picking their way through the minefield of free expression sounded interesting. I thought I'd like to join.*

## Notes to Editors

Title	<i>Walking the Tightrope</i>
Performance Dates	Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> – Monday 31 <sup>st</sup> August (not 17 <sup>th</sup> ), 3.35pm
Running time	90 minutes
Location	Underbelly Topside, Potterow, Edinburgh, EH8 9BL
Box Office	Tickets are available from <a href="http://www.underbellyedinburgh.co.uk">www.underbellyedinburgh.co.uk</a> Previews (5 <sup>th</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> Aug): £11 Normal Price (8 <sup>th</sup> , 9 <sup>th</sup> , 12 <sup>th</sup> , 13 <sup>th</sup> , 18 <sup>th</sup> , 19 <sup>th</sup> , 20 <sup>th</sup> , 24 <sup>th</sup> , 30 <sup>th</sup> , 31 <sup>st</sup> Aug): £14.50 (£13.50) High Price (10 <sup>th</sup> , 11 <sup>th</sup> , 14 <sup>th</sup> , 15 <sup>th</sup> , 16 <sup>th</sup> , 21 <sup>st</sup> , 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , 27 <sup>th</sup> , 28 <sup>th</sup> , 29 <sup>th</sup> Aug): £15.50 (£14.50)
Twitter	@Offstage_UK, @FollowTheCow, #tightrope15

## Offstage

Offstage was founded by Cressida Brown in 2006 after they staged their first site specific production *HOME* in a soon to be demolished tower block on East London's Beaumont Estate; the piece was inspired from interviews with former residents of the tower block and received news features on Channel 4, ITV, BBC London TV news. Since then Offstage have continued to be inspired by unheard or unusual voices and strived to push the boundaries of what site-responsive work could be. Offstage's award winning *Racine's Pheadre* led disquieted audiences around the ruins of Craigmillar Castle ruins at sundown and was again adapted from the stories and history of the local Craigmillar community. *Amphibians* by Steve Waters was based on interviews Cressida conducted with former Olympic swimmers and staged in the derelict swimming pool which previously had been hidden under the Bridewell Theatre's stage, off Fleet Street. Other work includes cross-art form *Drawing Play* (Yard Theatre), *Macbeth* (Bard En Seine, Paris), *Tempest* (for RSC at OSU), *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (Novello theatre) and Theatre Uncut (Theatre Row, New York). Cressida is Associate Artist of Theatre Uncut and the Yard Theatre. She was the recipient of the National Theatre Studio's Bulldog Prinsep bursary.

## Theatre Uncut

Theatre Uncut is a multi-award winning company that creates responsive political theatre, written by leading and emerging playwrights, and makes it available for anyone to perform anywhere. Over the past 4 years Theatre Uncut plays have been performed by over 6,000

people in 19 countries across 4 continents. *Theatre Uncut isn't just a performance, it's an idea: that theatre can be immediately responsive to world events, engender discussion and effect change* (Lyn Gardner, The Guardian).

## **Underbelly Productions**

Underbelly Productions is the live theatrical production arm of Underbelly Limited - producing, developing, promoting and managing a wide variety of shows at Underbelly's own festivals in London and Edinburgh, and on tour in the UK and internationally and in the West End. Current projects include *Close Up* - a new commission from CIRCA made especially for Underbelly's iconic Udderbelly purple cow tent, the international circus-cabaret smash hit *LIMBO*, cutting edge physical theatre show *Bromance*, UK tours of *Abandoman*, *Frisky & Mannish* and *Hot Dub Time Machine*, a host of exciting productions at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and our annual awards: *Circus Maximus*, the *Ideas Tap Underbelly Award* and the *Underbelly Adelaide Award*. Other recent work includes circus spectacular *Cantina*, legendary musical *Five Guys Named Moe* starring Clarke Peters, *Flawless: Chase The Dream*, *Scotch & Soda*, *Free Run*, *The Vocal Orchestra*, *Michael Winslow*, *Joan Rivers*, *The Magnets*, CIRCA's *Wunderkammer* and *Beyond*, Gandini Juggling's *Smashed* and *A Simple Space*.

All enquiries, high res images and further information:

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