

Oblivia

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Anna Krzystek (1968–2017) in memoriam



Anna & Oblivia

"I will come".

With those words our collaboration with Anna started in year 2000, when Oblivia just had been founded and I found it impossible to find people to work with in Helsinki. People who would be happy to plunge into the unknown. Anna was happy to do exactly that and joined us for "Not even Chekhov was here" in autumn 2000. From then on, Anna, Timo and me created together and performed 13 performances over 13 years.

Anna started to come over to Helsinki at least once a year in the beginning, later much more frequently. At the beginning we made site specific work or SPIFs as we called them. We took Beckett to a yard where we dug pits in the sand, we did "You can call me Art" in a cellar. In 2003 we decide to move to the black-box and start challenging it by using it in a traditional setting, but in a site sensitive way. As Anna said, the black box is the optimal tool for (our) performances, that is the best way to transmit and control the experience of the work, and it is a great tool for using the the depth of space.

All of our work was of course very well composed, since Anna was there as the compositional genius. Most of what I know about composition, and performing I have learned from Anna. Together we were what we called a group of Self-taught Geniuses. None of us had a formal academic training for what we did. But we wanted to create ways of working together.

In 2002 we spend time in the lobby of the Barbican eating half priced sushi from Tesco and brainstorming.

In 2003 for the performance Dogs we encountered for the first time the common brain that we then called Maria. It was all about togetherness. Brainstorming, working and thinking together.

Anna brought with her a working ethos that stemmed from Cunningham & Cage: that problems are there to be solved and material is nothing more than material and should be treated like that. It was all about the work. The work was the central point, the "we" were not that important. This created a healthy distance to the work.

Anna was an amazing and dazzling performer. She was pure energy and skill. She was more than incredible on stage. She was also a wonderful co-worker, a totally committed team player. Without her Oblivia would not exist.

In 2007 we moved into the Kiasma theater in Helsinki which was the start of Oblivias international career where we created the Entertainment Island trilogy that toured to 14 countries. We also came up with the Do what you saw method in 2008. A method that combined our ways of devising work collectively into a systematic fun and light way of communal material gathering, ending each day with a big impro where we used the material we had created during the day.

During that time we also started a systematical way of dividing the working periods over the year so that Anna did not need to stay for too long times on end in Helsinki in one go. It proved to be a very efficient way of working, 1 month fooling around, roaring with laughter (- oh Annas laughter), pause, one month gathering the material and starting the structuring process, pause, one month of structuring and fine-tuning the piece before going into the premier period with setting it onto stage.

Laughter was always an essential part of the working process. Anna was of course the mastermind in the rigorous piecing the performances together from a vast array of whacky material. She started to think about the composition at a very early stage, when I still was concerned with freeing the mind. We developed a unique performance language, where there was a lot of freedom in a very tight structure. Each persons uniqueness was visible at the same time as we shared what was specific for Oblivia.

Not to talk about the relation of sound and light in the performances. Because we did not work with a director, the sound and light designers became our most important outside eyes, thus sharing and influencing the creative process. Anna always spurred on the work and pushed it further, so in the end it shone in its utter beautiful quirkiness.

The relation to the audience was of high priority. We had long conversations on topics like accesibility that we thought was a very strange way of dealing with the audience relation - we made art for arts sake. Our way of involving the audience was to play with their minds, and working very closely with them in the performances, and of course we trusted fully in their capacity of seeing and thinking independently. It worked very well, nobody complained.

Anna, Timo, me became a very well tuned in trio. It was pure joy to perform together. Until Entertainment Island we had become masters of standing still, deadpan. Now we became masters of expression: fast, furious, unstingly physical and very funny. "You

cannot be vain, if you perform in Oblivia" was one comment. The most typical comment was (and is): "I have never seen anything like this before".

The collaboration was truly unique. It was a combination of personalities, genres – dance, theater, performance art, and skills, experiences, a mix of wit, humour, conceptual work and intelligence. And most of all it was Anna as the central genius with her love and care, amazing skill, humour and fierce intelligence, rigour and relentlessness.

In 2013 Anna decided to take a break, cracks were appearing in our collaborative relation. We remained in contact, we had been friends since 1997 when I took Annas dance classes at Dance Base, and Anna was honorary aunt of Timos and my daughter Emmi. We continued performing together, last time Entertainment Island in Ipswich at the SPILL festival in autumn 2016. We were joking about how we would perform EI when we were in our seventies. We loved to perform it, it became wilder and freer for each of its maturing years.

But - this was supposed to be a break, a pause: one of the pauses that were so important for our work, both the pauses on stage and the pauses inbetween working. A pause from which you emerge refreshed and ready to get on with the work.

None of us would ever have envisioned that this time around we were heading for a pause with no end.

Annika Tudeer
Artistical director and performer in Oblivia