

Opposable Thumb Theatre, Nordland Visual Theatre and London International Mime Festival present

OPPOSABLE THUMB

BIG BOYS DON'T CRY

Jacksons Lane
Fri 21 - Sun 23 Jan

BSL interpreted performance Sun 23 Jan
interpreted by Martin Fox-Roberts
Post-show discussion: Sun 23 Jan led by
Flick Ferdinando

Runs approx 60 mins, no interval
Age Guidance: 12+

Dik and Adam have made a new show. They had the brilliant idea of making a show about themselves, about being men. After gleefully digging beneath the surface, they soon realised that things can get very messy. In a riot of colour, dance, clowns and puppets, Dik and Adam take you on a hysterical journey that is full of heart, but close to the bone.

Big Boys Don't Cry, the latest production from the makers of *Coulrophobia*, an "endlessly watchable, sublimely entertaining double act" (Total Theatre), is an emotionally ridiculous story about manhood.

Cast:

Dik: **Dik Downey**
Adam: **Adam Blake**

Crew:

Director: **Emma Williams**
Writer in the Room: **Vic Llewellyn**
Music and Sound: **Simon Preston**
Costume: **Kelly Jago**
Production Manager / Lights:
Chris Collier
Movement: **Laura Dannequin**
Construction:
Dik Downey & Emma Powell
Producer: **Ali Robertson**

The Birth of Big Boys

Dik Downey has been performing as a street performer and clown since the mid-80s: the decade Adam Blake was born. In 2013 Dik was seeking an actor for the role of Eric, the puppet maker's apprentice for Pickled Image's ingeniously titled *'The Shop of Little Horrors'*. He auditioned Adam and was drawn to his absurd humour, his natural abilities as a puppeteer and his silly, silly face. They got to know each other through the rigours of creating that show and subsequently touring it around the UK and Europe. They discovered a shared love of puppetry and also of clown and it was clear that their skills and experience complemented each other well.

In 2014 they were commissioned to make a new piece of work, *'Coulrophobia'*; coming to it as equals, and understanding more of each other's style and rhythms. *Coulrophobia* was created in the wilds of the Arctic Circle at the headquarters of the inspirational Nordland Visual Theatre (NVT), Stamsund. The show, which is about two clowns trapped in a world of cardboard, somehow hit on something universal. It has plenty of speech, yet the language has never been a barrier in any country. It is not formally a comedy but has headlined international comedy festivals. It was originally expected to do a tour or two but has actually toured constantly internationally for over seven years, playing festivals and events throughout Europe and is still in demand, even in these Covid-ridden times.

In 2019 Adam & Dik set up Opposable Thumb Theatre and wanted to make a new piece of work, one that would showcase the new company. They were wary of trying to make *Coulrophobia II*, but knew they wanted not to go too far away from the style and strengths that they were developing. They came up with an initial concept to look at masculinity from the perspective of the Pinocchio and Frankenstein stories, and do so through clowning, puppetry and wild flights of fancy. They once again approached NVT for support and were thrilled when they agreed, and even more thrilled when the wonderful London International Mime Festival (LIMF) came on board. In February 2020, Opposable Thumb Theatre was playing *Coulrophobia* in London, with LIMF, and was all ready to dive into *Big Boys Don't Cry*, and everything looked rosy. And then suddenly news came out of China and the world was put on hold.

Through 2020 we threw ideas back and forth on Zoom. We were also fortunate enough to squeeze some actual R&D sessions in the gaps between lockdowns and through a series of improvisations, working with Emma Williams, our director, and Vic Llewellyn, dramaturg/writer in the room, we slowly started developing material. In 2021 we created a makeshift theatre in an empty office and rehearsed for 6 weeks. Not an easy thing to do whilst observing social distancing and all the furious hand sanitising but the team pulled together strongly. Among the worry and stress of lockdown and the pandemic we could do nothing but rely on each other and be honest with each other and as a result the show became more heartfelt than we had imagined. We had set out to examine what makes a "real" boy or man, but slowly we saw our concept grow and the show started to address more personal stories about fatherhood, parenting, mortality and our own experiences as men. Thank you for coming to the show. We've tried our best to make something honest and beautiful in these difficult times.



London International Mime Festival

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mimelondon.com

London International Mime Festival (LIMF) promotes contemporary visual theatre. Its productions have been nominated for, and won, Olivier Awards, and in 2017 the festival was honoured with the *Empty Space - Peter Brook Special Achievement Award* for its work over four decades. Founded in 1977, LIMF is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

Festival Directors:

Helen Lannaghan & Joseph Seelig

Production Manager:

Bill Deverson

Associate Producer:

Dawn Prentice

Press Representatives:

Anna Arthur

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Notes from Emma Williams, the Director

What are the major ideas behind the show?

The show is about emotional intelligence and the effect masculinity has on sharing those emotions. It is comedic and presents the ridiculous arrogance of men and the ludicrous way they navigate the world. But it also looks at what is behind this arrogance, the way it can disguise confusion, fear and insecurity.

The show centres around the two performers. Adam and Dik are visual and physical, they play on stage, it's absolutely joyous, they are big boys that don't cry. We examined where these skills came from and what is hidden underneath. The revelations were authentic, surreal, hysterical and once again show a struggle within masculinity. A struggle that existed if you are a man's man with a love of football and a strong slap for a hug or if you are a funny man that wears big shoes and falls over a lot. The show does not ask the audience to pity this struggle but it does ask that we acknowledge it in amongst the belly laughs.

We also explored the roles of fathers and sons, grief and joy, action man and wrestling and dreams and memories. The show is full and strange and feels suitable for the times we are living in.

As a woman how do you feel about tackling a show about masculinity?

I am a feminist. I am absolutely thrilled that the dominant male narrative in theatre is beginning to shift and that we are now seeing and hearing stories that have been suppressed or ignored for years. But I have two sons. My youngest is 21 he has lost two friends, both were young men and both killed themselves. There is a huge problem with communication, emotion and self-worth in men. To make a show that was prepared to really look at this was very important to me. The company was also very open to taking risks, to pushing themselves personally and professionally. If you are going to tell a male story, and we have had thousands of those already, it needs to have something to say. I'm also not sure I would have directed this type of show with any other company. Adam and Dik are completely unique, experienced, fearless, naughty and ridiculously talented. In fact the whole creative team was a phenomenal group of practitioners who were able to push, pull and question the material.

We often talk about who the story is about but rarely notice the way it is

told. Inspired by Ursula K Le Guin's book *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* we wanted to question the idea of the hero's journey, the notion that the story telling needs to be linear - it's a man with spear going out on a quest. In her book Ursula argues that fiction can be told in a very different way and that the forms of stories can suppress voices, it's not just the content. I loved the idea of creating a show about masculinity in a form inspired by this short and brilliant book.

Dik Downey has worked as clown, performer, street performer, and puppeteer since the 1980s. He co-founded renowned puppetry company Pickled Image in 2000 and was co-director and chief maker of the company until 2019, including on shows such as Yana and the Yeti; Coulrophobia; Shop of Little Horrors; Late Night Wolf Tales; Hunger; and Houdini's Suitcase. Through Pickled Image he regularly collaborated with other artists and organisations including: Mark Bruce Company, Green Ginger, Max Humphries, Puppet Broadcasting Company, Turak, Delit De Facade & Garsington Opera.

He has created several solo shows which he performs at various festivals and events across the UK and internationally and has designed and built puppets and masks across the UK, including West End, and on screen. He regularly teaches performing and making skills at RWCMD and elsewhere. In 2019 he formed Opposable Thumb Theatre with Adam Blake, with whom he has been touring for the last seven years.

Adam Blake's background is primarily in Clown and physical comedy. He fell into the world of puppetry while working with Dik and Pickled Image and has been trying to get out ever since, but it's too damn fun. That performing relationship with Dik over the years has turned into Opposable Thumb Theatre and has been an extremely exciting platform to explore and combine the worlds of clown and puppetry.

Adam has explored other theatrical forms including Fooling (solo improvisation), mask, comedy improv and storytelling. He has a huge passion for community arts including his intergenerational work with Wyldwood Arts where he takes groups of school children into care homes and runs story improvisation workshops. He has been the artist in residence at the National Trust property Tredegar House and has worked extensively in libraries performing and running workshops. Family and Street Theatre are other passions he has, having co-founded the

Open Attic Company and worked with Swish Boing (previously Mufti Games) and A Bird in the Hand Theatre.

Adam would probably be dead several times over if it wasn't for Debbie, his wife and life partner. They have two amazing sons together, Merlin and Otto, and have moved to West Yorkshire to be closer to the lovely countryside.

Emma Williams is a freelance theatre director. This is her first collaboration with Opposable Thumb. Previously she has created shows for Tobacco Factory Theatres, Bristol Old Vic, Bath Theatre Royal, National Theatre of Wales and Mayfest. She is Co-artistic director of In Our Hands Theatre Company and has also worked for a wide range of independent theatre companies, including acclaimed international puppet companies Pickled Image and Green Ginger; musicians Sam Halmarack and Joseph O'Farrell; composer Verity Standen; and musician/performer Kid Carpet. She also co-directed Vic Llewelyn's and Kid Carpet's Edinburgh fringe hit *The Castle Builder*.

She has written and directed outdoor productions for Activate, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Cheltenham Literary festival. For nine years, she was performance Director for The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama's Design and Puppetry production.

In 2020 she developed her audio work and became writer in residence for A Poetic City at The Red Lodge Museum, including creating the podcast *The Wicked Girls of Red Lodge*.

Vic Llewellyn Trained as an actor at École Phillippe Gaulier. He has been working in Theatre as a performer, writer and deviser for 30 years. His show *The Castle Builder*, written and devised with pop star legend Kid Carpet, was met with National acclaim, and toured as part of Battersea Arts Centres' CTN tour. His current show, *A Little Death*, premiered at the Bristol Old Vic in 2018. He is working on a new show, *Last Man* for production in 2022.

He has worked with Theatre Alibi, Travelling Light theatre, Bristol Old Vic Tobacco Factory Theatres, Green Ginger, and Shakespeare at The Tobacco Factory. Notable appearances include: *The Author* by Tim Crouch at The Royal Court Theatre, Father Christmas in *Raymond Briggs' Father Christmas* at The Lyric Hammersmith and Picasso, in *The Boy who bit Picasso* at Oxford Playhouse.