

**BERTA FREISTADT  
COLLECTION:**

**Women's Theatre  
1970s-1990s**

# BERTA FREISTADT

“I’ve been involved in the theatre since I was tiny; my mother took me to plays. I went every week for years and years. I’ve seen and read every play that’s been on the British stage up until about the mid-1950s”

(Berta Freistadt)

1.

## **Scrapbook**

### **Photographs of Berta Freistadt's work with Repertory Theatre**

This page shows photographs of Berta both on stage and off. Annotated to indicate friends, boyfriends and various shows, this scrapbook documents her acting, dressing, stage managing work with the Perth Repertory Theatre in 1963. Berta trained at the Junior and British Drama Leagues before she toured with the Repertory companies around the country. Berta also kept all the letters that she received from her mother who sent them from her family home in Wimbledon. These letters show all the various destinations that Berta was staying at throughout her tours with Rep theatre during the 1960s. The Perth Repertory specialised in British mainstream, popular and musical theatre productions.

2.

**Make-up case**

**Berta Freistadt's suitcase containing her collection of make-ups**

1960s and 1970s

This suitcase contains a number of rare and vintage make-ups, hair slides, dyes and nets, powders, face-paints and small props from her Repertory days in the early 1960s to the Cuckoo and Sidewalk Theatre Company era in the late 1970s. Objects of note are the very dated 'Negro Black' face powders, Max Factor 'Pancake' blue face foundation (a 1914 invention that went out of production in the 1950s) false eyelashes, established theatrical make-up labels that are now out of production: Caprice, Leichner and Pancro rouges, eyeshadows, lipsticks, foundations and blending powder.

3.

### **Scrapbook**

#### **Photographs of Berta Freistadt's work with Skin and Blister theatre company**

Berta was one of the founding members of the women's theatre company Skin and Blister in 1981 and here she is pictured in character as Renate Von Seeveld in Grazyna Monvid's play, *The Enemy Within*. Berta's character was a villain and wife of an SS officer in the play about one British woman's bravery employed as a spy in Germany during the Second World War. Berta's scrapbooks are arranged chronologically to document her personal contribution to theatre in photographs; this is the only coverage of her work with the company in the collection.

# LESBIAN THEATRE

“The lack of consensus and the continued disputes amongst feminists over the definition of ‘lesbian’ pivot centrally around the question of essentialism. Exactly who is a lesbian? Is there such as thing as a lesbian essence? Does ‘woman’ include lesbian? Can we speak of a ‘lesbian mind’ as distinct from what Monique Wittig calls ;the straight mind’? My own position is that ‘lesbian’ is a historical construction of comparatively recent date, and that there is no eternal lesbian essence outside the frame of cultural change and historical determinism.”

(Diana Fuss)

1.

## **Playbill**

Pamphlet for the Gay Sweatshop X12 Festival  
1987

The X12 Festival was in celebration of the gay theatre company's twelfth year in activity following the success of their X10 showcase of new gay writers. The programme features some poignant images of gay identified men and women in the theatre and demonstrates the company's new ethos to fully represent the writing and performance of black and lesbian writers as well as the new inclusion of disabled gay people's theatre and advertising disabled access (this was before the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 deemed it necessary for all businesses and organisations to start making reasonable adjustments to ensure people with disabilities could access their services). This festival boasted the first production of black lesbian playwright Jacky Kay's *Twice Over*, commissioned and supported by the Theatre Centre and performed by Gay Sweatshop. The playbill features an early performance by Julian Clarie.

2.

### **Character Portrait Photograph**

Jude Winter as Heddy in *Pulp* by Tasha Fairbanks  
1985

This photograph was taken by Anita Corbin, an established photographer of women in subcultures in the 1980s, as a publicity shot for the Siren theatre company production of *Pulp*, by Tasha Fairbanks. The play was billed as a 'lesbian detective thriller' and involved representations of the typical femme fatale characters for women but within roles ordinarily written for men, like assassins, reporters and detectives. The play is inspired by the 1950s film noir style in order to evoke a genre that typically employs a patriarchal narrative staged by a women-only cast. Siren Theatre was founded by Jude Winter, Tasha Fairbanks and Jane Boston in 1980 in Brighton and went on to become an established but predominantly unfunded lesbian theatre company producing their own devised plays and productions in London.



### 3.

#### **Correspondence from Gay Sweatshop to Berta Freistadt**

Regarding their work for the 'Stop Clause 28' Campaign

1987

**“The key provisions of Section 28 that became law on 24 May 1988 were as follows:**

- 1) A local authority shall not:**
  - (a) Intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;**
  - (b) Promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.**
- 2) Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease.” (Local Government Act 1988, Section 28, sub-section 3)”**

**(Anya Palmer, “Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaigning: A Report from the Coalface”, 34)**

This item was a newsletter to all members and supporters of Gay Sweatshop outlining the work that they were planning to create and distribute in defiance of the Bill passed that declared any “promotion” of homosexuality in the arts and education unconstitutional. They highlight the banning of a number of supportive and educational plays for young people in schools and reiterate the danger of this new law to social, cultural and political advancement for gay civil and human rights to expression. Gay Sweatshop’s Philip Osment talks of their work for the cause:

**“When Section 28 was given its first reading the Gay movement was caught unawares. In very little time a campaign was mounted to draw attention to the discriminatory nature of the legislation which ended with lesbians abseiling into the Lords and handcuffing themselves to Sue Lawley’s desk during the ‘Six O’clock News’ [...] The company called a meeting at the Drill Hall just after Christmas and the Arts Lobby was set-up. This proved to be a very effective way of opposing the section and drew many influential figures into the campaign who were vociferous in expressing their concern. The press conference at The Playhouse organised by the Arts Lobby and Ian McKellan was one of its greatest achievements. At the press conference prominent figures from the Arts pledged their support of the campaign and their abhorrence of the prejudice behind the legislation.” (Philip Osment, *Finding Room on the Agenda for Love*, lxii)**

#### 4.

##### **Character Portrait Photograph**

Pip Stevenson as Laura Normill *The Life and Death of Laura Normill* by Berta Freistadt  
1986

This photograph was taken as a publicity shot for the No Boundaries theatre company production of Berta Freistadt's lesbian play, *The Life and Death of Laura Normill*. The play text addresses both the 'normality' and the uniqueness of the lesbian identified lifestyle and it was important to the No Boundaries company that lesbian characters were represented by lesbian actresses. This photograph was reproduced for press reviews of the play as the image of Pip Stevenson represented visibility for the figure of women who challenged the traditional hetero-normative ideal of femininity.

5.

**Programme for *More* by Maro Green and Caroline Griffin**

A Gay Sweatshop production at The Oval House

1985

The play is billed as “A Radical Love Story” and was written and produced for Gay Sweatshop’s X10 Festival new writing showcase in celebration of the company’s tenth anniversary making theatre. The play addresses the less visible disabilities of anorexia, bulimia and agoraphobia within a lesbian relationship context. Despite the serious subject matter the play is set up in the genre of an absurd comedy using pantomime techniques. The design of this programme uses the cut and paste style popular in the 1980s that highlights certain suggestive imagery by creating a print collage. Women’s own impressions of the female body were often used in feminist theatre advertising in order to reclaim ownership of the way they were represented in public.

6.

**Programme for *Fanny Whittington* by Sue Frumin**

A Shameful Practice production at The Oval House

1988

**“This version tells the story of a North of England young dyke who brings her cat to London for a Gay Pride march and gets separated from the rest of her party. The big city is a dangerous place, where those who look like friends turn out to be enemies in a society dominated by free enterprise and each woman for herself.” (Sandra Freeman, *Putting Your Daughters on the Stage: Lesbian Theatre 1970s-1990s* 95)**

This play was a lesbian spoof of the fairytale *Dick Whittington* performed by the theatre group Shameful Practice at The Oval House, South London. The Oval House was a venue devoted to experimental work and was managed by Kate Crutchley, a former administrator and director for Gay Sweatshop who encouraged the development of gay, lesbian, black women and feminist theatre in the space. Sue Frumin formed the company Shameful Practice, so named after a statement in a London newspaper claimed Jewish lesbians should “stop this shameful practice”. The play was a commentary on the desperate capitalist acts that women were often led to in the wake of Thatcher’s introduction of ‘Free Enterprise’. These were topical and politically suggestive plays that made satirical reference to contemporary states of economy and society. The design is an example of the non-budget, cut and paste style that was used to put flyers and programmes together for unfunded fringe and alternative theatre practices.

7.

**Programme for *Dancing Princesses* by Robyn Vinten, Helen Sandler, Rosie McCormick and Michelle Jameson**

A Slip of the Tongue production at the London Women's Centre  
1995

This play was performed by Slip of the Tongue theatre group at The London Women's Centre. The programme demonstrates a continuation of the trend for turning the fairytale genre on its head to represent women and lesbians in a positive scenario by deconstructing a traditionally patriarchal narrative. The design for the cover is of a hand-made and home-made style, a necessary low-budget effort for small or new theatre companies with no funding or financial support. The company has chosen to promote and make visible the overt message, theme and plot of the play with an image of a lesbian couple on the front. This was an important and challenging political move during a time when lesbian relationships were rarely portrayed in the media and even less commonly in a positive, happy or healthy light. These plays were often primarily written about lesbians for lesbians since there was little else in support of their possible experiences but were also meant to appeal to the popular audience with song, dance and comedy.

The programme contains advertisements for services run by gay identified people such as couriers, removal and t-shirt printing companies who marketed to the niche custom that they represented. It was sometimes difficult for lesbians and gay men to receive equal treatment in employment and the workplace and these services were set up in defiance to demonstrate their equal value as professional service men and women. Before the 2006 Equality Act stated the Sexual Orientation Regulations which outlawed discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in goods and services, this was still an unaddressed issue.

8.

**Programme for *Ooh Missus* by Winnie Eliot and Lois Charlton**

A Red Rag production at The Oval House  
1991

**“Ooh Missus is surely the forgotten literary offspring of a drunken brief encounter between Ray Cooney and Andrea Dworkin. On a set of Ayckbourn-like suburban splendour, the familiar conventions of farce and sit-com are acted out from a sisterly angle.” (Sam Willets, *What’s On*, 9-16 May 1990, cited in Freeman, 105)**

This play was performed by Red Rag theatre company, a seventeen woman strong cast discussing the topic of lesbian motherhood through insemination. This was a farcical look at the modern lesbian stereotype from a radical feminist perspective including music and high energy comedy that dealt with serious and contentious issues for the early 1990s. Red Rag was set up Winnie Eliot, Lois Charleton and Carole Noble and the name was meant to be suggestive of their socialist feminist political leanings, their provocative style: ‘like a red rag to a bull’ and women’s experiences of menstruation. They formed in 1987 under the tutelage of Jill Davis, drama lecturer and feminist lesbian theatre scholar at the University of Canterbury and editor of *Lesbian Play One* and *Two*.

## 9.

### **Programme for *Patience and Sarah* by Isabel Miller**

A Kate Crutchley production at The Oval House

1983

This was a lesbian themed novel by Isabel Miller (1969) adapted for the stage by Joyce Holliday with music by Shaz Nassauer. The programme shows the two women in period dress kissing the image representing the clandestine homosexual relationship that the play centres around, set in nineteenth century America. The play paints a picture of two women lovers on a farm in Connecticut in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was a highly influential book for lesbian identified artists in the 1970s – 1990s and Split Britches' lesbian theatre duo, Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver played Patience and Sarah for this production. Freelance director and manager of The Oval House, Kate Crutchley, was commissioned to direct this production and based on her proposed audience for the piece, decided to include an explicitly sexual relationship between the two characters, one that the heterosexual author had not originally written in.

## 10.

### **Photocopied Advertisement**

Regarding the recruitment of a “lesbian actress” for the No Boundaries theatre company  
Undated

This flyer was hand-written, photocopied and distributed for the No Boundaries theatre company with which Berta Freistadt was closely involved. The company produced a number of Berta's plays including *The Life and Death of Laura Normill* (1986 and 1989) and *A Fine Undertaking (Closet Capers)*(1986). It had become important to many new theatre groups for lesbian plays to include lesbian identified actresses in order to attempt a full and faithful representation of the images, lifestyles, experiences and ideas of lesbians. This was also a move towards supporting the employment of female actors who did not embody the hetero-normative image of ultra-feminine women that is generally preferred for casting in traditional theatre productions. The idea of a 'lesbian theatre' in the contemporary parlance can suggest rigid or exclusive representation of homosexual women 'queer theatre' or the subject of 'gay women', terms formed to stand for a more inclusive and non-specific sexual identity are more often favoured today. No Boundaries' work can be generally described as by lesbians, about lesbians, for lesbians.



# **Black, Asian and European Women's Theatre**

“The designation of a generic title could, on one hand, invite marginalisation, while on the other it could offer a means of uniting black dramatists and theatre-workers, ‘so people know we’re here’, and thereby attract targeted funding from the Arts Council”

(D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre*, 171)

1.

**Press Cutting from Talk Talk newspaper**

Interview with Theatre of Black Women by Sue Croft

1984

**“Despite [...] criticism of the ways the socially and culturally dominant feminist ‘we’ elides differences between women, many of these ‘black’ and ‘lesbian’ and queer theorists and practitioners continued to identify as feminists. Under the influence of these voices [Theatre of Black Women] (‘white’) Western feminism started to produce its own self-reflexive critiques of the way its ‘we’ failed to take account of differences within the category ‘women’.” (Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, *Feminist Futures?*, 8)**

Entitled with a quote from one of the cast, “Where do black women fit in? Nowhere. Hardly ever do we see our lives on stage” this interview talks to Bernadine Evaristo, Vinny Dhillon, Jacqueline de Peza, Ella Wilder and Patricia Hilaire from The Theatre of Black Women and highlights the lack of or poor representation of black women in theatre. After the helpful injection of financial support from the GLC (Greater London Council) into the theatrical work of black and other women of marginalised ethnicities, towards the 1990s there was a marked difference in the demonstration of cultural consciousness in feminist theatre.

2.

### **Playbill for *Silhouette* by Bernadine Evaristo**

A Theatre of Black Women production at The Factory  
1984

This play was both written and performed by Bernardine Evaristo and Patricia Hilaire at The Factory theatre. Evaristo went on to write and perform works with Gay Sweatshop in the late 1980s. *Silhouette* was fully sponsored and funded by the GLC and Marks and Spencer and performed as part of the GLC's Women Challenging Racism conference. Philip Osment, key administrator for Gay Sweatshop, wrote in 1989:

**“In 1984 the Labour-controlled GLC had begun to make its mark on the services provided for Londoners [...] As far as the arts were concerned the new policies which emphasised the need to fund ethnic and minority arts had a radical effect. It was as if, for the first time, the capital had woken up to the fact that we were living in a multi-cultural society and that this should be reflected in concert-halls and theatres, in art galleries and libraries.” (Philip Osment “Finding Room on the Agenda for Love”, liv)**

This programme describes the production inside: “A two woman show contrasting the experiences of Black women today with those of Black women under slavery to find out what lessons are appropriate for black women fighting oppression in the eighties.” It was important to open up a dialogue between talented black women writers and the black women of the theatre audiences about their own experiences, political and social issues and identities.

3.

**Programme for *Pyeyucca* by Bernadine Evaristo**

A Theatre of Black Women's production

1984

**“This work often [...] eschewed realist forms as expressive of a white, Western bourgeois subjectivity, in favour of strategies that reflected the specificity of black women's cultural experience and legacies, including those arising from inhabiting ‘multiple and interrelated identities’” (Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, *Feminist Futures?*, 8)**

*Pyeyucca* was written and performed by Bernadine Evaristo and the Theatre of Black Women in an all black woman production. The play is about black women searching for evidence of their culture, heritage and ethnicity in British society. Inside the mysterious caption reads “Every girl has a best friend. Pyeyucca was born in a doll, but who is she really? Maybe your parents know, or your psychiatrist – or your hairdresser.” Bernadine Evaristo is an established and award winning author of fiction about black culture and history.

#### 4.

##### **Playbill for *Chiaroscuro* by Jackie Kay**

A Theatre of Black Women production at the Drill Hall  
1985

Jacky Kay was an influential black lesbian and women's playwright who produced a considerable volume of work during the 1980s for both Gay Sweatshop and The Theatre of Black Women. *Chiaroscuro* is about black women and feminist's treatment of homosexuality within their social spaces and cultural identities. This production was performed at The Drill Hall Arts Centre, directed by Joan Ann Maynard and funded by Camden and the London Borough of Hackney, North West Arts and GLC. The play deals with the contentious subjects of homophobia within black women's social circles, being triply marginalised (as a black person, a woman and a lesbian) and the debate about prioritising topics on the black feminist agenda.

## 5.

### **Playbill for *The Coloured Museum* by George C. Wolfe.**

This was a travelling production at the Royal Court as part of the London International Festival of Theatre and The New York Shakespeare Festival and was produced by Joseph Papp. Berta collected this as part of her 'Black Women's theatre' archive, however it is more prominently the history of the oppression and subsequent creation of a contemporary 'black people's culture' and the current stereotypes manifestations of the 'black' identity. The playbill describes the performance:

“The savagely hilarious *The Coloured Museum* unveils a picture of what it *really* means to be black in America. Presented as an exhibition in a cultural museum, the eleven exhibits display ever-more bizarre fantasy and wicked parody as the masterful cast slips from character to character, taking swings at the whole array of sacred black imagery. Diana Ross, Whoopie Goldberg, Sidney Poitier, James Baldwin, and of course Michael Jackson – all are turned on their heads with a razor sharp sense of the ridiculous. It is black America laughing at itself and white stereotypes of it. Its serious subtext shines through as a celebration of black survival and achievement through the ages [...] The coloured museum is a masterpiece of sardonic wit which will make you think uncomfortable thoughts as you split your sides laughing.”

It was a revue of sketches and vignettes based on various black characters that discussed and represented 'black culture' looking at men in war, gay men, actors, modelling, music, women's hair, cooking and employment among others.

## 6.

### **Programme *Love at a Loss* by Catherine Trotter**

A Wild Iris production at The Bush Theatre

1993

This production of a Restoration comedy was not exclusively black or women's theatre but the company was set up by women who were activists in the Women's Liberation Movement; Polly Irvin and Adjoa Andoh. The company's success may be largely due to its production of classical plays like Ibsen's *A Dolls House*. The company was largely run by women and a key patron of theirs was Joanna Lumley.

These were professional women theatre practitioners but they did not make 'women's theatre' strictly for women, by women or about women:

"As entertainers we wish to tell good stories well and to do so with a freshness and raw energy that will directly engage our audiences. As theatre practitioners we aim to create a form in which a variety of cultural and theatrical forms can influence the generation of new work and the revitalisation of classical texts."

Adjoa Andoh had previously made productions with Gay Sweatshop and The Theatre of Black Women, appearing in Jacky Kay's major plays, *Twice Over* and *Chiaroscuro* in the 1980s.

7.

### **Playbill for Sistren Theatre Collective**

1984

This is a pamphlet that outlines the working ethos, manifesto, intentions and trajectories of the black women's group, Sistren Theatre Collective who were sponsored by The London International Festival of Theatre and West Indian Women's Association (London). The company devised, developed and produced their own plays that discuss issues that face black women culturally, economically, socially and historically. The pamphlet describes the collective within:

“Sistren Theatre Collective is an independent popular theatre company which works at advancing on questions affecting women, particularly those from the Caribbean area. The collective is the only theatre group in the Caribbean which has developed from the initiative of working class women. It is made up of women whose experience is a living testimony to the meaning of oppression. Sistren came together in 1977 when for the annual Workers Week celebration in Jamaica we performed our first piece of theatre “Downpressin’ get a Blow”



8.

**Programme for *Present Continuous* by Sonja Lyndon**

An Offstage Downstairs production

Berta's collection under the heading of 'Black Women's Theatre' utilised a very general term and the it actually incorporates the documentation of work from women of Asian and European ethnic backgrounds as well.

Offstage Downstairs were a feminist theatre company who produced an all women's performance of *Present Continuous* directed by Penny Casdagli (who went under the writer's pseudonym Maro Green and co-wrote *More for Gay Sweatshop*). This play discussed issues of gender performance, inequality and sexual difference in Japanese culture with a particular focus on the plight of women. The programme features an excerpt from an article in *The Guardian* by Polly Toynbee castigating the archaic conventions of the society for its oppression of women.

9.

**Programme for *Brooklyn E.5.* by Nicolle Freni**

An Old Girl's Network production

1983

**“In theatre the ‘blackened out’ views of a dominant white feminism prompted ‘othered’ women to make, write and perform works exploring identities informed not only by gender, but by complex *intersections* of race, class and sexuality.” (Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, *Feminist Futures?*, 7)**

This performance directed by Sue Glanville features a female cast of actors who were immigrants in London from various European backgrounds. Another production that was sponsored by The London Borough of Hackney and GLA, this is a lesbian women's play about women of Cypriot, Greek and Italian origin living in East London.

The plays documented in Berta Freistadt's category of ‘black theatre’ are productions that discussed racial opposition from the ‘mainstream’ in theatre which was often considered white and racist.

**10.**

**Programme for Latin American Women's Theatre Group:  
Katun Performing *La Hora Cero*.**

**“Katun: Is the beginning of a new group of Latin American Women looking for new forms of expression to link our cultures”**

The programme is hand designed and photocopied onto coloured paper, a financially viable method of advertisement for unfunded alternative and fringe theatre groups. The insert features two poems about women's experiences in their home countries and are about motherhood and survival within war-torn environments and patriarchal ruling. These were plays dealing with contemporary realities separate from a white English speaking monopolisation of popular culture.

# WOMEN'S THEATRE

“History was re-staged through a feminist lens and mostly a Brechtian-feminist aesthetic to demonstrate past oppressions and to give dramatic expression to a feminist plea and urgency not to revisit, not to allow the oppressions of the past a place in future histories”

(Aston Elaine, *Feminist Futures?* 5)

1.

## **Press Cutting from Spare Rib**

1979

**“The magazine’s editorial approach and general content in the early issues suggest that its founders in fact hoped to appeal to feminists and non-feminists alike. The traditional ingredients of women’s magazines were integral to *Spare Rib*: the home, beauty, fashion and personal relationships. Its readership did appear to be fairly diverse: letters pages suggest that although most readers were young, middle class women, a combination of middle-aged housewives and working women, single and married women of all ages and those suspicious of women’s liberation as well as those active in the movement not only read, but actively contributed to the early *Spare Rib*.” (Selina Todd, *Models and Menstruation: Spare Rib Magazine, Feminism, Femininity and Pleasure*, 61)**

A page of theatre reviews that report on several women’s feminist productions in London, including Sidewalk Theatre company’s production of *How the Vote Was Won* for which Berta Freistadt was a collaborator. *Spare Rib* was a second-wave feminist magazine that discussed women’s creative arts and feminist politics and was founded in 1972 when The Women’s Liberation Front was emerging as a serious activist movement. The magazine ran until 1993 and its success can be said to be due to its diverse and non-specific feminist agenda and its appeal to arenas both inside and outside the fringe.

2.

**Programme for *Trafford Tanzi* by Claire Luckham.**

An Everyman Theatre Company production at The Mermaid Theatre  
1981

**“It does hurt to do it properly, and whilst you don’t have to be an athlete, you do have to be fit and brave.” (Claire Luckham, *Plays by Women Two*, 96)**

This production was performed by Everyman Theatre Company at the Mermaid Theatre, Blackfriars, as part of a British tour. The play was written especially for the mixed company of men and women after it was decided that there were not enough plays written with equal male and female parts and very few from a strong and positive female protagonist’s perspective. The play centres around a wrestling ring in which the female wrestler Trafford Tanzi comes of age and, quite literally, fights for her own independence and success. It was inspired by Luckham’s discovery that there was still a local byelaw in London that banned women’s wrestling in the city. Claire Luckham also wrote the play *Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing* in 1976 for the feminist theatre company Monstrous Regiment’s first performance.

### 3.

#### **Programme for *The Pack of Women* devised by Robyn Archer**

A Die Hard company production at the Drill Hall Arts Centre  
1981

This was collaborative musical comic cabaret for women artists, writers and performers of the Die Hard collective which was made up of various men and women from Gay Sweatshop, Hormone Imbalance, Shameful Practice, Cunning Stunts and other more academic, musical and journalistic arenas. This was the first performance at the venue that had been changed by Julie Parker, with the financial help of Greater London Arts and a brewery, from Action Space to The Drill Hall Arts Centre. The idea was to promote mixed heterosexual, gay and lesbian theatre, theatre by women and theatre by men and women that had a political commitment. The devising process was based on original material by Robyn Archer, a lesbian-feminist Australian writer, singer and composer, directed by Pam Brighton. Within the programme the challenges for Fringe theatre are outlined strongly by the producer's notes:

**“In the current economic situation we took on a huge task with this small show – not only to finance and stage the show itself but to re-open a venue with it. So, the results are only in front of you tonight because of the extraordinary efforts of our 17-strong company and the staff of The Drill Hall – a group of seasoned, professional theatre workers enthused and challenged by the idea, and working ridiculous hours at many jobs each. And, in this, we have been supported and encouraged by the beleaguered Fringe as well as by established companies who are feeling for the first time in a long while the chill winds of an economic recession whistling around their own offices and theatre foyers.”** (Dianne Robson and Diane Manson)

#### 4.

#### **Programme for *One Woman Plays* by Dario Fo and Franca Rame**

Yvonne Bryceland in a version by Olwen Wymark at the National Theatre's Cottesloe Theatre  
1983

This production marks the financially supported and recognised promotion of the genre of one woman plays, with *A Woman Alone*, *Waking Up* and *The Same Old Story*. Franca Rame had begun to write extremely provocative socialist feminist one woman plays in the 1970s after her own experiences of sexual abuse by men under an oppressive national regime. Under the branding of the Fo and Rame name her plays were widely and internationally published and produced with more success than any other female playwright within the genre. Yvonne Bryceland was a South African theatrical revolutionary who opened up the first mixed race theatre in South Africa, the Space Theatre in Capetown in 1972. Olwen Wymark was a playwright during the 1970s predominantly writing from traumatised, distressed or oppressed women's perspectives. This production ran for two and a half hours with an interval, performed entirely by Bryceland.



5.

**Programme for New Clear Energy by Cunning Stunts**

Performed at the Tricycle Theatre

1984

Funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain, this was a performance in protest against Nuclear weapons and the oppression against women living in countries at war. This was a polemic reaction to the threats of the Cold War and the patriarchal rulings that result in global threat. Cunning Stunts were a circus influenced troupe of lesbian and feminist acrobats, actors and musicians who created comic, musical acrobatic, physical and dance related performances with a strong political commitment. Inside the programme they describe their political inspiration for the piece:

**“We feel that throughout the ages two things have gone hand in hand: women and peace, and men and war.**

**Women have given birth, cared for and nursed their children, their families, their friends and the earth around them. They are in touch with everyday realities. The reality of TODAY is that other people, without consulting us, are allowing deadly poison (including radiation) into the water, the ground and the air we breathe; they are polluting our minds and our bodies with destructive images and contemplating exploding nuclear weapons which will put an end to life on earth as we know it. They can be stopped and must be stopped. We as women, must find our strength to resist the nuclear threat, to show the world that we want to use our energies for peace.”**

## 6.

### **Programme for *Violence* a 'Reclaim the Night' event for women's theatre, poetry, talks and workshops**

Performed at Action Space theatre

1979

Action Space was later transformed into the Drill Hall Arts Centre in 1981 after Julie Parker took over as manager of the building. This event gathered women artists and academics to showcase political reactions to socially oppressive and restrictive circumstances for women as part of the Reclaim the Night benefit for which feminist groups and other women gather and march through the night in protest of the dangers imposed on women when walking the streets after dark. Berta Freistadt's 1976 play *Regina vs Vagina* was billed as part of this event which was a surreal courtroom drama about a woman who obstructs the police. Berta appeared as part of the cast for this play as well as playwright of *Any Woman Can*, Jill Posener. The programme offers a blurb on this performance:

“The script was written [...] in the spirit of total irreverence to the great British Judicial System. A crazy battle between Truth and Liez, Sanitee and Insanitee! A surreal courtroom where an outrageous Authority makes you laugh at its Antiks while you grasp as it mirrors the real world”

7.

**Programme for *Appetite of the Heart* by Mine Kaylan**

A Scarlet Harlets production at The Drill Hall

1987

A performance by the Scarlet Harlets, choreographed and directed by Birte Pederson, this was an all woman production. It was a visual and physical dance piece funded by London Boroughs Grant Scheme and GLA and performed by three women at the Drill Hall Arts Centre. On the reverse is quoted Time Out magazine saying: “*Appetite of the Heart* conjures the notions of fantasy and desire with a delicious, albeit tantalisingly elliptical; sense of anarchy, anger, adventure and danger.”

The Scarlet Harlets were founded in 1981 and consisted of 3 female theatre practitioners and *Appetite of the Heart* was an experimental piece that explored eroticism through movement, light and sound. They are now called the Scarlet Theatre Company and create mixed theatre.

8.

**Programme for *Curfew* by Siren Theatre Company**

Performed at the Oval House theatre

1981

This was Siren theatre's second production in the second year of their time as a company and was performed by the founding members of the Brighton based company, Tasha Fairbanks, Jane Boston and Jude Winter. The group had root sin street theatre and used elements of mime, dance and live music in their work. The performance is described within the programme:

**“Curfew is a play about male violence against women – the ways in which we experience it, the ways we respond to it and are fighting it. Areas of violence examined in the play include pornography, rape and men’s control of women’s sexuality. Through the eyes of three women we look at the ways in which a psychological curfew operates for all women. We follow them through memory, dream and nightmare to their discovery of a common strength.”**

The programme states that this was an unfunded production and that the audiences should contact the Arts Council if they enjoyed it.

9.

**Programme for *Rebel in Paradise* by Howard Zinn**

A Moving Target Theatre Company production at the Young Vic Theatre, London

1987

**“Since woman’s greatest misfortune has been that she was looked upon as either angel or devil, her true salvation lies in being considered human, and therefore subject to all human follies and mistakes” (Emma Goldman)**

Originally written and performed in New York in 1976, this production was a socialist, unionist play about an inspirational woman for the movement, Emma Goldman. She was a Russian refugee born in 1869, who became political anarchist and speaker in America around the turn of the century. She founded *Mother Earth* radical magazine and spoke on women’s emancipation, sexuality, free speech, economics, birth control, war, literature and theatre. In 1917 she was imprisoned for 2 years for anti-conscription activity, deported to Russia and fled from the Bolsheviks to write and rally in Europe. The programme shows enthusiastic support from various unions including NALGO, the National and Local Government Officers Association, National Union of Public Employees (“Full-time rights for part-time workers”), Transport and General Workers Union and Tass, the manufacturing union - all promoting equal opportunities for women in the work place.

There is a close relationship between socialist and feminist movements and politics in their work towards appealing to volumes of oppressed masses through theatre. Often they both create re-visualisations, re-presentations and re-writings of how women and the working class have been marginalised throughout history despite their equal significance and contribution to society.

**10.**

**Programme for *Out of Bounds* by the Scarlet Harlets**

Performed at The Oval House

1982

The Scarlet Harlets describe themselves as “a feminist collective theatre company who share their skills and devise and perform work which aims to combine the personal with the political.” This is a reference to the second wave feminist term the “personal is political” which encouraged the emergence of autobiographical storytelling in women’s theatre. This idea prompted women to disclose their experiences in order to challenge the conditions and circumstances under which women were living in Britain as a result of political and social issues. This production was funded by the GLC and the British Council and they used mime, mask, music and storytelling to explore friendships and taboos.

11.

**Programme for *Pinchdice and Co.* by Julie Wilkinson**

A production by The Women's Theatre Group

1989

**“It's about values and achievements which are under siege today”**

This was an all woman, GLC funded production which makes political and social analogy out of a historical reflection on the siege in 14<sup>th</sup> century Damascus:

**“*Pinchdice and Co.* is set in a world where acquisitiveness is seen as the engine of progress, where survival is a matter for the ‘family’, and where the poor must depend on charity. No-one has the right to expect a living. It's a world of breath-taking hypocrisy. Where the powerful unashamedly claim the sanction of their deity. And it's a world where women no matter what their status, are marginal; and where the poor and ‘colonized’ women get all the dirty jobs”**

The company claim that this is “just like the dispossessed of Thatcher's Britain” dealing with ideas of capitalism, unemployment, high taxes and inequality in the 1980s. It was widely proposed that during Thatcher's Prime-ministerial running, “7% of the population owned 84% of the wealth” from which the Scottish socialist theatre company, 7.84, took their name and slogan speaking out against capitalist materialism and economical inequality during the 1970s and 80s.