

SOPHIE HUNTER

PRESS

Salt of The Earth

Venice

2024

The FT / Rachel Spence

“ A liminal blend of salt and fresh water on the edge of the Adriatic Sea, the Venetian lagoon exudes an uncanny, ancient stillness. Even today, if you take a boat out at dawn, its salt marshes can feel prehistoric. Yet this morning women are moving gracefully through the eerie wetlands that are one of our most precious environmental resources...Entwined with their oasis, one group..pause to look behind them. Resembling architectural columns, their stance suggests both longing and determination. It is as if they are imprinting the scene on to their mind’s eye for transmission to future generations. ”

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Salt of the Earth – ‘an impassioned call to protect the world’s precious salt marshes’

The multidisciplinary environmental project directed by Sophie Hunter begins in Venice — but has wider ambitions



The film that forms part of 'Salt of the Earth' was shot in Venice's salt marshes © Jack Phelan

Rachel Spence SEPTEMBER 4 2024



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“Salt marshes are the last wild places in the UK. These liminal intertidal spaces have often been associated with outcasts, people living on the fringes of society. How can we shift our perception to realising how much value they have on so many levels?”
..Determined to bear witness to the marshes she loves, says Hunter, “she chooses to look, to stay, to pay attention, rather than to go, forget and move on. That’s the heart of the piece – the potential sacrifice in that act”

“The 45-minute installation asks “what is it to bear witness? To pay attention?” says Hunter. “That is absolutely vital in saving the environment. As the poet Mary Oliver said, ‘Attention is the beginning of devotion.’ Pay attention, connect and then there’s something you want to fight for.”

“Hunter and her scientist collaborators on Salt of the Earth are desperate for artistic interventions to motivate action. We need stories, she argues, to help people connect to the natural world. We can consider remote scientific data – rising carbon emissions, rising global averages for heat or seas – all we like, but really we need to experience how the crisis reshapes human lives.”

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Installation

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'The last wild places': the Venice show about Earth's spiralling salt marsh crisis



These spaces are associated with people on the fringes' ... a scene from Salt of the Earth. Photograph: Jack Phelan

They are eco marvels but they are fast disappearing. Sophie Hunter explains why she is using film, music, a few tonnes of salt and a reimagined wife of Lot to sound the alarm

Eerie, desolate wastes in old novels, salt marshes are still seen as flat, grey and inhospitable landscapes today. Rainforests, meadows, oceans and even peatlands have their celebrity champions. But now there is someone to speak up for the magnificence of the tidal marsh: Sophie Hunter, theatre-maker and opera director, hopes her new performance installation will make us take more care of these crucial, carbon-sequestering coastal guardians.

A salt marsh doesn't attract attention, perhaps because not much seems to happen in these expanses of grass and creek. "And then it disappears twice a day, which is extraordinary," says Hunter, sitting miles from any marsh in a north London pub, visibly refreshed after her return from her traditional family holiday, swimming, sailing and savouring the salt marshes of a location she asks me not to reveal, with her husband, Benedict Cumberbatch, and their three sons. "Salt marshes are the last wild places in the UK. These liminal intertidal spaces have often been associated with outcasts, people living on the fringes of society. How can we shift our perception to realising how much value they have on so many levels?"

Hunter reimagines the story of an outcast - the biblical figure of Lot's wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt for daring to look back at the homeland she was forced to flee - in a new performance installation, Salt of the Earth, which delivers an urgent plea to save salt marshes. Each square kilometre of which actually sequesters and stores far more carbon than the same area of forest, as well as providing natural flood defences and biodiversity sanctuaries for endangered species. Yet more than half of the planet's salt marshes have already been degraded or destroyed. And more are lost every year to development, rising seas and, ironically, human-made flood defences.

■ The show, which may tour globally, will even fund a salt marsh PhD at the University of Padova

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The Seven Deadly Sins & Bluebeard's Castle

Teatro Colon
2023

★★★★★

La Nación

“The “sung ballet” of The Seven Deadly Sins is an impeccable production, from a staging, theatrical and musical standpoint.”



El “ballet cantado” de *Los siete pecados capitales* en una realización impecable desde lo escénico, teatral y musical. FERNANDA TEATRO COLÓN

Crítica de clásica

★★★★★
**LOS SIETE PECADOS
CAPITALES Y EL CASTILLO
DE BARBAZUL**

**Iluminadora
combinación
de óperas
del siglo XX**

LOS SIETE PECADOS CAPITALES, DE KURT WEILL Y BERTOLT BRECHT. ELLENOS: Stephanie Wake-Edwards (Anna I), Dominic Sedgwick y Egor Zhuravski (hermanos), Adam Gilbert (padre), Blaise Malaba (madre) y Hanna Rudd (Anna II, bailarina). EL CASTILLO DE BARBAZUL, ELLENOS: Karoly Szemeredy (Barbazul)

última colaboración de esta dupla creativa histórica que conformaron Kurt Weill y Bertolt Brecht, de 1933, exactamente un año antes del “Cambalache” discepolino. En este sentido, la alianza de estas dos óperas breves del siglo XX en una única jornada resultó atinadísima. Además, en un plano amplio y comprensivo, ambas gozaron de muy buenas realizaciones, tanto en lo escénico y teatral como en el plano musical, con una actuación brillante de la Orquesta Estable del Teatro Colón dirigida por Jan Latham-Koenig.

Los siete pecados capitales es un genuino producto cultural de aquella República de Weimar en la que convivieron experiencias musicales de las más distintas, entre ellas, la de la fusión de lo académico con lo popular —en este caso, las manifestaciones derivadas del jazz—, y las búsquedas por llegar a otros públicos. Pero, argumentalmente,

fantasía y creatividad en la que intervienen luces, recursos de video y movimientos escénicos muy dinámicos y perfectamente ensunados en los que intervienen los dos Annas; la familia, siempre inmóvil, y una media docena de bailarines. La mezzosoprano inglesa Stephanie Wake-Edwards, que transcurre su canto mayormente por su octava inferior, cumple correctamente su papel aunque, por momentos, su canto fue subsumido por la orquesta. En contraposición, el bajo Blaise Malaba, nacido en Congo, cumpliendo el rol de la madre, lució sólido como solista y como la base sobre la que se asienta el coro familiar. Por su parte, la inestable y trabajadora Anna II fue muy bien llevada adelante por la bailarina inglesa Hanna Rudd. Y la música de Weill fluye sutil y mordaz con sus peculiaridades y todas sus bellezas.

Tras la pausa, quedaron definitivamente

fulguraron sobradamente con sus papeles, los grandes artífices de la creación sonora del drama y el sostén de la inquietud y el desasosiego fueron Jan Latham-Koenig y los músicos de la Estable. La orquesta sonó impecable, sin fisuras ni distracciones. Con todo, para que la ópera tuviera una representación de excelencia, también acá es necesario destacar, especialmente, a Sophie Hunter y su concepción y dirección escénicas. Físicamente, el castillo de Barbazul no existe. La ópera se desarrolla sobre un escenario despojado y oscuro. En el centro, aparece un gran disco con una ligera inclinación hacia la platea sobre el cual se desplazan, siempre muy lentamente, Barbazul y Judith. Por sobre ellos, majestuosas, una esfera gigantesca. Las siete puertas por abrir, están distribuidas en los márgenes del disco como tapas de cofres que Judith irá levantando, como se ve en la imagen. Una representación de la ópera de

“ Hunter’s staging creates so much impact with very little. She assembles the short scenes into a rhythmic continuum to create a great visual display... an extraordinary production. ”

“ Sophie Hunter’s production is an admirable display of fantasy and creativity, involving lights, video elements and very dynamic and perfectly assembled stage movements in which the two Annas, the motionless family, and half a dozen ballet dancers take part. ”

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Operas en el Teatro Colón

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Los siete pecados capitales, ballet cantado de Kurt Weill y Bertolt Brecht.
Elenco: Stephanie Wake-Edwards (Anna I), Dominic Sedgwick y Egor Zhuravskii (hermanos), Adam Gilbert (padre), Balase Malaba (madre) y Hanna Rudd (Anna II, bailarina).
El castillo de Barbazul, de Béla Bartók y Béla Balasz.
Elenco: Károly Szemerédy (Barbazul) y Rinat Shaham (Judith).
Puesta en escena: Sophie Hunter. Orquesta Estable del Teatro Colón.
Dirección musical: Jan Latham-Koenig.
Martes 27 de septiembre, Teatro Colón.
Repite viernes a las 20 y domingo a las 17.

Por Santiago Giordano

Los siete pecados capitales y El castillo de Barbazul surgen, cada una a su modo, de los escombros de dos civilizaciones: la de la Mitteleuropa de razón imperial y la de la ópera de aspiración burguesa. Tanto la de Kurt Weill y Bertolt Brecht cuanto la de Béla Bartók y Béla Balasz son obras límites, compuestas al borde del vivir que se derrumba, entre los albores de la Primera Guerra y el ascenso del nazifascismo. La temporada lírica del Colón las presentó el martes, en una producción con dirección musical de Jan Latham-Koenig. Una combinación atinada de dos obras en muchos sentidos divergentes, acopladas por el hilo sutil de la muy buena puesta en escena de Sophie Hunter.

Los siete pecados capitales, estrenada en París en 1933, no es una

MUSICA Los siete pecados capitales y El castillo de Barbazul

Dos óperas muy bien combinadas

Cada una a su modo, las obras de Kurt Weill-Bertolt Brecht y Béla Bartók-Béla Balasz surgen de los escombros de dos civilizaciones.



Los siete pecados capitales encierra una prédica contra la infamia del capitalismo.

que produce la música de Weill, entre el cabaret, el jazz y la tradición salomera europea. A menudo su voz, de timbre poco atractivo, quedaba cubierta por la orquesta y a veces por su propio vibrato. En contraste, el bajo congolés Blaise Malaba, en el rol de la madre, fue un solista sólido y una excelente base sobre la que se asentó el coro familiar. En definitiva fue la puesta, dinámica y colorida, lo que salvó a una obra híbrida en su naturaleza, cuya prédica contra la infamia del capitalismo, que hoy se escucha más cerca de algún museo del mal-humor proletario que de las instrucciones para el Hombre Nuevo, ya no inquieta. Tampoco al público del Gran Abono -donde se supone puede haber algún campeón del capitalismo criollo- que aplaudió a rabiar.

El gran momento fue *El castillo de Barbazul*, obra maestra de Bartók. Compuesta en 1911 y estrenada en 1918, es su única ópera. El compositor utiliza un libreto en el que Balasz elabora un clima simbolista muy personal, con elementos de la fábula que Maurice Maeterlinck escribió sobre Charles Perrault. “Mirad como yo os miro”, dice el bardo que introduce la obra, representado por una voz en off. Sobre la escena despojada, atravesada por brumas medievales creadas por proyecciones -gran trabajo de la videasta Nina Dunn-, se eleva la gran pupila, la que todo lo mira y por donde todo pasa. Debajo, sobre un disco, están los personajes de ese viaje inmóvil, los artifices de esa confusa forma de amor que atrae

“ A fusion of excellent interpretations of two classic works from the beginning of the 20th century... this performance is the most avant-garde and daring of the year ”
- Clarín

“LOS SIETE PECADOS CAPITALES” Y “EL CASTILLO DE BARBAZUL”

Llegó el riesgo a la conservadora temporada lírica

“Los siete pecados capitales”

Última colaboración de una de las duplas creativas más trascendentes de la historia del género, *Los siete pecados capitales* cuenta el derrotero de Anna (personaje desdoblado en una cantante y una actriz) a través de siete ciudades de Estados Unidos, y en la búsqueda de la prosperidad que le permita un hogar para ella y su familia en su lugar, Louisiana.

En cada una de esas ciudades, “las Annas” se enfrentarán a un pecado distinto, en episodios que serán comentados por los cuatro miembros de la familia, a modo de coro griego.

La producción, a cargo de un equipo diferente del anunciado en su momento, lleva la firma de Sophie Hunter, **directora y actriz británica de trayectoria en teatro y cine**, y cuyo contacto con la ópera se ha dado hasta el momento más en el terreno experimental y en espacios no convencionales que en los teatros oficiales.

Su concepto de la obra de Weill no se aparta de su condición de **ballet cantado**: la lograda coreografía de Ann Yee ocupa el primer plano, sobre una escenografía que, con pocos



Los siete pecados capitales. El ballet cantado de Weill y Brecht, en una puesta de lograda coreografía.

elementos y complementada a la perfección por el video, el vestuario y la iluminación, otorga dinamismo (gran trabajo del equipo de Samuel Wyer, Nina Dunn y Jack Knowles).

La mezzosoprano Stephanie Wake-Edwards **cumple a la perfección** con su papel de Anna, y forma una dupla deliciosa con su doble coreógrafo, la exquisita Hanna Rudd.

Como los parientes de la protagonista, Dominic Sedgwick, Adam Gilbert, Egor Zhuravskii y Blaise Malaha integran **un ensamble compacto y de muy buen rendimiento vocal**.

vió de base a la ópera *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* de Paul Dukas (1907).

También tiene una **partitura potente**, de gestos expresionistas y una orquestación que contrasta con la sobriedad de la escena. O mejor dicho, que vuelca en la música todo aquello que la escena no muestra.

La apuesta de Hunter se centró en **un planteo de casi total estatismo para los personajes**, y apostó por volcar el drama en el interior de una esfera gigantesca proyectada en video y suspendida sobre sus cabezas.

Podría interpretarse que esta caja de Pandora -otro **trabajo bellísimo** de

tos van despertando en su interior.

El baritono húngaro Károly Szernédy y la mezzosoprano israelí Rinat Shaham fueron **intérpretes de lujo que lograron sostener la tensión con la sola fuerza de su canto**, a pesar de que, inmersos en una escenografía abierta, no tuvieron el balance ideal.

El experimentado director inglés Jan Latham-Koenig, nuevo director musical del Teatro, llevó adelante ambas partituras con mano segura al frente de la Orquesta Estable, aunque por momentos en el caso de Bartók la sonoridad resultó excesiva.

En síntesis: una conjunción de ver-

Phaedra

Happy Days Festival

2015

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Why is Sophie Hunter taking Britten's Phaedra to a Beckett festival?

How the experimental stage director joined the dots between Benjamin Britten, Jean Racine and Samuel Beckett



Honouring Beckett ... Sophie Hunter. Photograph: Rex Features

The curatorial vision at the heart of Happy Days, the Samuel Beckett festival held in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, is as dynamic as it is mischievous, with the links between the programme and Beckett often intriguingly oblique. The result is not only a thrilling sprawl of work, but also an implicit invitation to the audience to play an active part in understanding it. We are asked to trace the intellectual connections back to Beckett and, as I have discovered, each one opens up not only new readings of the work in hand, but also a deeper appreciation of the great man himself.

I have my own links to Beckett as the recipient of the Oxford Samuel Beckett award that champions emerging experimental theatre-makers. My work has begun to explore the space where theatre, visual art and contemporary music intersect. I recently joined forces with opera singer Andrew Staples to rethink the classical concert experience and tackle a new generation of opera making. So when Happy Days festival artistic director Sean Doran approached me to direct *Phaedra*, Benjamin Britten's cantata for solo voice and chamber orchestra, I jumped at the chance.

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“An exquisitely realised image of frozen grief”
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Happy Days: international Beckett festival review – exquisite Britten; comical, otherworldly drama

★★★★★



Frozen Grief ... mezzo-soprano Ruby Philogene as Phaedra in Britten's cantata. Photograph: John McVitty

Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh

Moving immersive performances of Britten's *Phaedra* and Beckett's *All That Fall*, along with his otherworldly *Ohio Impromptu*, starred in this year's lineup

“towering (in every sense)...the director is becoming increasingly acclaimed for her work in opera and classical music”
- The Times

What Sophie Hunter — aka Mrs Cumberbatch — did last week



Benedict Nightingale

Last updated at 12:01AM, August 4 2015

The director is becoming increasingly acclaimed for her work in opera and classical music

One image in particular sticks in my mind from this year's Enniskillen International Beckett Festival: an opera singer delivering Britten's version of Racine's *Phaedra* from the top of a white dress that fell 15, 20 feet to the bare earth of a riding centre below the ruins of Necarne Castle, a few miles out of Enniskillen.

Ruby Philogene was the mezzo who stood high above the Ulster Orchestra and brought anguish, rage, grief, poignancy, an unsettling joy and then a strange calmness to the often feverish, sometimes poignantly quiet cantata that Britten wrote in 1975, when he, like *Phaedra*, was approaching death.

As she sang, her undeniably elegant dress, apparently made of a soluble variety of celluloid, began to auto-destruct — its rents reflecting the mind of a woman who, having taken poison after confessing her love for her stepson, was in the last 15 minutes of her life. Her director, the brains behind this towering (in every sense) and moving (both emotionally and literally — Philogene rotated very slowly on an invisible plinth) performance, was Sophie Hunter.

“She’s revolving, she’s hallucinating, she’s bombarded with a turbulence of memories and visions, an isolated figure who makes you feel the heat and fire and lust and boiling veins and then a burning cold as poison courses through those veins and her flesh turns to ice,” said Hunter, when we met after the performance. “And there’s an ecstatic euphoria as she finishes surveying the landscape of her life,” added Andrew Staples, the music director and Hunter’s collaborator on a past production of Britten’s *Rape of Lucretia* and

Ruby Philogene in
Sophie Hunter’s
production of Britten’s
Phaedra
Andy Staples

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“truly enthralling”
- The Guardian

Kelly Grovier

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Happy Days: Enniskillen International Beckett festival 2015 review - truly enthralling

★★★★★



Diffusion of self into place: audience members cross at twilight to Devenish island for a performance of

Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh

Beckett's spirit comes to vivid life among the ancient churches and lonely loughs of Northern Ireland

“Fifteen minutes of creative brilliance”
-The Stage

Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival review



Michael Rothmann, Roman Kaminski, Axel Werner, Gerd Kunath in Warten Auf Godot. Photo: Monika Rittershaus

What's on **Theatre** *by Jane Coyle - Aug 2, 2015*

For four years, the island town of Enniskillen has been at the epicentre of the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival. Under director Sean Doran, Happy Days attracts artistic excellence of the highest order. Far from being a po-faced affair, its programmes are laced with wit and some degree of eccentricity. Audiences troop uphill and down dale for performances on land, on water and underground.

Warten Auf Godot

The Ardhowen Theatre, perched above Upper Lough Erne, hosts the first visit to Ireland of the Berliner Ensemble with its UK and Irish premiere of *Warten Auf Godot*. This radical production has gathered controversy over the years. In 1984, Beckett gave director George Tabori permission to frame it as a play within a play, a concept which has evolved into a version peppered with subversive theatrical mischief. The translation from French to German, with English surtitles, prompts daring new visual references and unfamiliar speech rhythms. They are delivered by a cast who have been together since the 2006 opening, with Axel Werner's Wladimir a thrilling study of elegant physicality.

Phaedra

Fifteen minutes of creative brilliance can make for a true festival event. Sophie Hunter and Andrew Staples' collaboration on Benjamin Britten's last vocal work is exactly that. At the centre of a vast, darkened equestrian arena within an abandoned castle, mezzo soprano Ruby Philogene stands motionless aloft a towering, revolving funeral pyre of ruched white silk. Ulster Orchestra players are ranged around, while Jack Knowles' blades of light relentlessly slice into the final segment of a life wracked by forbidden love. Glorious of voice and calm of purpose, Philogene articulates the fatal plight of Racine's tragic heroine through Robert Lowell's eloquent translation. It is torturous to witness her agonisingly slow physical and emotional disintegration unravelling dramatically to an undefined end.

The Turn of The Screw

Aldeburgh
2015

“ Sophie Hunter and Andrew Staples created an atmospheric semi-staging for Britten’s opera; the Aurora Orchestra and superb soloists were spot-on ”
– The Guardian

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Review

The Turn of the Screw review - beautifully nuanced and atmospheric

★★★★☆

Snap Maltings, Aldeburgh

Sophie Hunter and Andrew Staples created an atmospheric semi-staging for Britten's opera; the Aurora Orchestra and superb soloists were spot-on



10

Remarkably poised ... Louise Moseley as Flora and Sophie Bevan as the Governess in The Turn of the Screw at Snape Maltings. Photograph: Sam Murray-Sutton

Supernatural in Suffolk was the theme of Aldeburgh Music's annual Britten weekend, with the composer's last opera at its heart. Henry James's ghost story dictates its own haunting atmosphere, but core to Sophie Hunter and Andrew Staples' (also singing Quint) production - neither concert performance nor fully staged - was the Governess, surrounded by instrumentalists, held at the midpoint of a cuboid cage. Wound with oblique lines of white ribbon, this construct was symbolic both of the intricate string-manipulation of the game of cat's cradle and the claustrophobia of the house at Bly. Action around the perimeter was made more eerie with the effects of lightning, torch flames and mist machines for

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69 Degrees S.
BAM Harvey Theater
2011

ARTS & LEISURE

Skimming the Ice, Strings Attached

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By **Charles McGrath**

Oct. 27, 2011

OF all the things we pay money to sit in a theater and watch, puppets are surely the strangest. By and large they are not particularly good at the thing we most often ask them to do — imitate us, that is — and yet people (some people anyway) love them precisely for their limitations. Puppetry may even be enjoying one of its periodic revivals right now. “[War Horse](#)” is such a hit in large part because of its marvelous lifelike horses, and in “[Compulsion](#)” last winter a marionette of Anne Frank was the only character with enough stage presence to stand up to Mandy Patinkin. In our enlightened era some fortunate puppets have been allowed privileges denied to the likes of Howdy, Kukla, Ollie and the rest. Basil Twist, arguably the master of avant-garde puppetry, has incorporated them [into a drag show](#), while in “[Avenue Q](#),” they get to talk filth and have sex.

The six three-foot-tall marionettes in “69°S.,” an ambitious multimedia piece by Phantom Limb that opens Wednesday as part of the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s [Next Wave Festival](#), are not so blessed. They’re mute, all-male and celibate, and what they mostly do, wearing boots, hoods, heavy coats and fur mittens, is trudge — or glide, rather, in that magical stiff-backed, light-footed marionette fashion — over a spectral Antarctic landscape, occasionally sinking to their knees in exhaustion or rubbing their hands before an

STAGE REVIEW

'69° S.' is entrancing

By **Don Aucoin** Globe Staff, February 10, 2012, 12:00 a.m.



"69° S." tells the story of Ernest Shackleton's antarctic expedition using marionettes manipulated by performers on stilts. PHANTOM LIMB/PHANTOM LIMB

For desolate Patriots fans who could use a reminder of happier times, consider this:

As Bill Belichick was preparing his team for the 2001-02 season - the one that ended with the first Super Bowl victory of the Belichick era - he gathered them for a screening of "Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure," a film about the arduous 1914-16 expedition led by Sir Ernest Shackleton.

Once the season began, Belichick kept reminding his players about what he called the "principles of endurance, courage, and teamwork" that enabled Shackleton and his men to survive a grueling ordeal. The coach later said it helped forge the much-noted bond developed by that year's team.

Football aside, the near-mythic dimensions of the Shackleton expedition story have prompted a spate of films, and several books as well. But for sheer power to haunt the imagination, to capture the sense of isolation felt by that small band of men when they were trapped on the bottom of the world with no guarantee they would make it out alive, it's hard to picture anything surpassing "69° S. (The Shackleton Project)."

Following Shackleton to Antarctica to make '69° S.'

'69° S.' envisions the explorer's trek

By **Jeffrey Gantz** Globe Correspondent, February 4, 2012, 12:00 a.m.



Four-foot tall marionettes operated by puppeteers on stilts re-create Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition. PHANTOM LIMB

In "69° S. (The Shackleton Project)," the New York-based Phantom Limb Company combines theater, dance, photography, film, an original score, live musicians, and 4-foot-tall marionettes operated by puppeteers on stilts to re-create the 1914 Antarctic expedition in which Anglo-Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton's ship, *Endurance*, was crushed by pack ice and he led his crew to safety.

The title of the show, which ArtsEmerson brings to the Paramount Center Tuesday through Feb. 12, refers to the latitude at which *Endurance* sank. The inspiration for the piece, Phantom Limb cofounders Erik Sanko and Jessica Grindstaff say, came to them on a 90-degree day in New York.

"Erik had this really interesting idea to put puppeteers on stilts," Grindstaff recalls by phone, "so they could have the full range of the stage. And for some reason we were both picturing this all in white. And I had been wanting to make a ship, which was kind of a transformation puppet. So we said, 'Where is it always white, with just one isolated black ship?' And then we remembered these iconic images [taken by photographer] Frank Hurley from the Shackleton expedition."

“ 69° S. is entrancing ”
– The Boston Globe

“ A remarkable achievement of multimedia artistry, the spellbinding 69° S. is like nothing you’ve ever seen before. ”
– Backstage

69°S.

BY LISA JO SAGOLLA | LAST UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 4, 2019



Photo Source: Pavel Antonov

A remarkable achievement of multimedia artistry, the spellbinding “69°S.” is like nothing you’ve ever seen before. An imaginatively evocative depiction of British explorer Ernest Shackleton’s 1914 expedition to Antarctica, the show takes its title from the latitude at which Shackleton’s ship sank, forcing the heroic leader and his crew to spend seven months hauling

their lifeboats to the sea and seven days rowing out to Elephant Island. When Shackleton realized that they would never be found out there, he and a few men trekked 800 miles to a whaling station and were eventually able to bring all of the others to safety.

Created by Phantom Limb in collaboration with David Harrington/Kronos Quartet and developed with Tony Taccone, the 75-minute show, directed by Sophie Hunter, begins by slowly and powerfully setting the scene. The frosty Antarctic climate is convincingly conjured on stark white flooring, with three mounds of white cloth that eventually grow into giant glaciers, as designed by Jessica Grindstaff. The forbidding towers of ice are shimmeringly lit by Andrew Hill, who also dazzles us with “snowflakes” of flickering light racing blizzardlike all around the space. Harsh, atmospheric wind and water sounds emanate from Kronos Quartet recordings, enhanced by Skeleton Key, four men in natty white suits playing guitars and drums and situated one each in boxes house right and house left. Projected on the backdrop are video images (by Shaun Irons and Lauren Petty) drawn from archival photographs of the real-life events.

Engulfed in the ferociousness of nature and feeling the desolate quality and sense of danger that pervades the polar region, we suddenly see the scaffolding of the wrecked ship. From the boat emerge Shackleton and his crew, each explorer represented by a white-robed puppeteer on stilts manipulating a three-