

# Eddie Ladd

in conversation with Sarah Broughton

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Eddie Ladd is a physical theatre performer, worked with Brith Gof for ten years, began making her own work during that time and is now making performance based work for the web (funded by NESTA), touring and creating her next two pieces, *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Stafell*.

SB: Can you tell me when you became interested in theatre?

EL: I think I said when I was four that I wanted to go on the stage - I mean God knows how you'd know at four!

SB: So you did drama at university?

EL: And met Brith Gof - *they* taught us in the first year! So there was Mike Pearson and Liz Hughes Jones.

SB: As soon as you began working with Mike and Liz did you immediately think 'this is me'?

EL: The thing was that they showed you the culture that you'd come from and I'd no idea what this culture was, I'd no idea of how special it is, or what its characteristics were because, in a way, it was totally on the floor that culture at the time.

SB: You stepped out of it in order to be able to see it? So that was the beginning of your observation of your culture as opposed to being completely part of it?

EL: Yes - and ironically through someone like Mike Pearson who is from Lincolnshire and learnt Welsh.

SB: Did you know though at the time what was happening - or is that in retrospect?

EL: That's in retrospect! That's years down the line!

SB: When did you become involved in Brith Gof?

EL: I auditioned for Brith Gof in 1990 and thank God I did because these opportunities don't come that often and the people they took in that intake they worked with for the next six, eight, ten years.

SB: So at what point did you form 'Jesus & Tracy'? Was it formed for Callas Sings Mad Songs?

EL: I think it was formed for a piece called C D E, which was about pianos and other related bits.

SB: I've never heard about this show before!

EL: I know, I know, because this is part of the unacknowledged CV you know! I don't put any of my own work down before Callas really.

SB: Through all of this, were you becoming more aware of the importance of your own background, of how that was going to be absolutely vital?

EL: Not at that point, no. Because I went into a complete denial detour! I went and did a show about Maria Callas which had everything to do with feminism and female power which is why I was so attracted to her. And then I did a show about Leni Riefenstahl (Unglücklicherweise) which is about the position of the artist in society.

SB: So there must have been some sort of shift of focus - from Callas to Riefenstahl?

EL: A lot of these descriptions you come to through art-speak, by the necessity to describe your ideas to the Arts Council, or even to a journalist or to journalists who don't exist who you might have to talk to! So you say - ah yes it's about the position of the artist in society and you think that probably is why I've chosen this person but then you think, well why did I choose Maria Callas? Because I was absolutely obsessed with how do I function as a woman? Really it was a huge concern at the time. I was fascinated by personal willpower - of course I was - that's what I was embarked on. Because you think, well how am I going to live then? What am I going to do in the 40 years I've got? It's a period of showing yourself and forming your identity.

SB: Can you take me through the process then - of how you go from that to the next piece of work - Once Upon A Time in the West?

EL: It was one of those ideas that dropped, just down, it came down from somewhere.

SB: That was your first time of collaborating with ...

EL: Cliff (McLucas).

SB: Again that idea of somebody from the outside ...

EL: Telling you what they are seeing and, of course, it's vital to the process - to this day now you have to rely on that.

SB: What did that do in terms of how you started to look at home and culture and language, sense of place - because that has completely informed you ever since really, hasn't it?

EL: Yes it has - I mean you know, you'd think I was like that from year dot but I wasn't. I can't believe I got through three years in Aberystwyth without being more politically active.

SB: Were you trying to distance yourself at that point? Trying not to be the girl from home?

EL: I felt inadequate that I wasn't more political. I felt utterly challenged by it and you feel less somehow, you think 'I'm part of the problem'. But you're not part of the problem. I'm a peasant and I came in with that consciousness and of course all the problems that come with that - English is the way to get on. But the great thing I was so happy about for Once Upon a

Time in the West was that it was written in Ceredigion dialect and Pembrokeshire dialect and it was beautiful to write.

SB: It was an almost revelatory experience to make a show which was the culmination of years of process - not to rediscover an identity but to find an identity - yet all this is taking place in the middle of real turmoil?

EL: Chaos! In a way, the working the show out was the exact opposite of what I was doing in my emotional life because it was a controlled structure - it had a line, it had a beginning and an end - whereas the other side was just purely cyclical. By '97 it was obvious it was doomed, the whole thing was just doomed, it had just death all about it.

SB: It was bleak.

EL: Extremely bleak. And I felt less than alive really. I felt like an alien.

SB: Does the next show reflect that?

EL: The next show, Lla'th, was much harder to do. It was almost like a farewell to something and I knew it was at the time. I knew I was leaving a period behind at that time and this was a show that was all about death. Lla'th was about people breaking up and dying, seriously dying and yet it was about trying to keep certain aspects of West Wales alive as well by remembering the stories.

SB: Did Scarface feel like it was another leap?

EL: Yes - I don't know what kind of leap it was but it was the show that's been best received. You know this narrative already even if you've never seen the film; you know what's going to happen. I loved it simply because we eventually decided to film it all at home. We put this American narrative in this peasant environment and the Spanish-Cuban and then Miami comes in and then Wales-England comes in and the language they're going to leave behind in order to inhabit the new space. Leaving the Welsh language behind is a theme that has eventually come up again. The physicality of Al Pacino was instrumental in my thinking about my physicality for the rest of the next three years. None of his moves are inward at all, he's out in space all the time and that filtered in there somewhere and answered something. I began to think about my physicality - which can be a retiring one or an incredibly ambivalent one where I show something and refuse to reveal it at the same time. A lot of people have said about my work - it's elliptical, obtuse and you're not telling us what you mean. I think it's a characteristic of this nation - where you have been so intruded upon, where it has been so insisted that you are included and that you are included through the operation of the English language - whether you want to or not. Well maybe it's not surprising that we keep something in reserve here, that our outward actions are kind of cloudy sometimes?

SB: There's a kind of veil between?

EL: Yes - the necessary veil really. Why would you give out anymore! Because it won't ever be used for your benefit. So in a way Al Pacino became the corrective model which was great. You could do anything through him! People would say 'oh you look like him' you know and not that I looked like him but you adopt the icon and you adopt the physicality and the physicality was not difficult to adopt that was the strange thing.

SB: Maybe that's the thing then, the opening out - having gone from opening out of your internal concerns in Once Upon A Time in the West and then the physical manifestation of them? ...

EL: I wasn't troubled by physicality in Once Upon a Time in the West and I wasn't troubled by physicality in Lla'th, I think by Scarface I noticed a tendency - definitely the idea of his physicality revealed something, I think.

SB: Do you think that's changed forever now?

EL: I think once you have the awareness you can't undo the awareness. The next two shows that I'm doing, or did, immediately address that idea of the physicality and what does it do to your body and your physical and mental health. Because Club Luz, scurting back to poetic narratives, has no through-line whatsoever even in the script - but it's a meditation on the figure of Trent and his condition and our condition as Welsh people.

SB: Did that idea occur to you during Scarface?

EL: Club Luz was formed during the tour of Sawn-off Scarface. We were going round Europe and suddenly you're in a country where people speak four languages. I think of it as a kind of Berlin show - a bit Teutonic - funnily enough, because I'd made American shows up until then, and of course it was influenced by 9/11. I began to think how can you be a small country in the world and do no harm to nobody and leave no shit whatsoever - I wanted to make a show which was about a virtual future in Wales. But I failed to make it because I suddenly had to deal with current, pressing things and the current pressing thing is this feeling of self-loathing, cultural self-loathing, so I started addressing that one. Which I'd started to address in Scarface because it's obvious that the problem is the narratives that you receive about your culture from the outside, from big, massive outside. But I couldn't deal with the future of Wales because I couldn't think of one. Oh God!

SB: This is just around 9/11?

EL: Since 9/11 there's only one subject in town - how you work as a nation in the world and what you, as a nation, do to other nations which provoke them or allow them to work against you. Where does it stop? Where does it start? How do you operate? How do you be? Once I saw Trent in Shock Corridor, thought 'recognise that!' It was a relevant thing because the more I looked at it, the more I see how much of that is still here - it's still in this country! Fuck, it's awful! So the work I'm doing now on the NESTA project is a kind of physical examination of that - as Margaret Ames, who I'm working with at the moment, said 'Well you're not a site of pathology'. Ah - I was so hoping to be! But these behaviours which I've learned because whatever relationship the country is in with the country next door - it does show up on you, somewhere along the line, in a way. So that's what this current project's about.

SB: Obviously you're moving into working in a different medium now - in the web-based thing - how does that affect what you actually do?

EL: I was interested in that, simply because you can do very specific work without being a stage Welsh person - hopefully - it could go out to the whole world and it equalises

everywhere. Funnily enough by saying it equalises everywhere I want to use it in order to stress the place I'm actually from, a place which is regarded as on the edge of nowhere.

SB: Where do you think you'll be in three years?

EL: Now then, I get the biggest fright thinking about what I will do so I don't think about it. I like that idea of playing in the present. I probably deal with the past and the present but I just don't deal with the future.

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