



My Dearest Girls



A duo of performances marking the centenary of WW1



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RURAL THEATRE COMPANY



Francesca Millican-Slater

ABOUT MY DEAREST GIRLS

My Dearest Girls is a duo of performances; *My Dearest Girls: The Letters Book* & *My Dearest Girls: Helen's Story*. They are written and performed by Francesca Millican-Slater based on original source material.



Using a letters book found and stored in Shropshire Archives Francesca has uncovered the stories of 6 women, explored through these 2 productions.

Written between 1917-1920 the letters book contains the letters of six young women connected by schooling together in Bridgnorth, Shropshire. Against the background of War they keep in contact through round robin letters addressed to

all, sent bundle by bundle, each woman adding her reply to the last and sending them on.

While two of the girls remain in Shropshire, the others have moved to London, Birmingham, Bury St Edmonds and Kent, offering different views and perspectives of the war years in town, city and country.

My Dearest Girls: The Letters Book is a full length show with live music and interval, perfect for rural touring venues, small scale studio theatres and arts centres.

My Dearest Girls: Helen's Story is a short 30-minute performance designed to work in the context of wider events such as festivals, history days, village fetes, museums, libraries, schools and more. (Helen's Story can be performed up to 3 times a day in 1 location).

The duo of performances allows flexibility in presenting options, from full length show, to no-tech 30 minute performances which can work in almost any context and setting.

My Dearest Girls was commissioned by Arts Alive and Shropshire Archives (with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund) in 2014 in response to the upcoming centenary anniversary of WW1. It is produced by Pippa Frith. *My Dearest Girls* is specifically designed to offer alternative stories of WW1, the stories of women, those left behind in rural communities.





The Letters Book:

My Dearest Girls: The Letters Book tells the stories of six women across county, town and country as their friendships evolve, history happens and the war begins to draw to a close. These are tales of everyday life; of life as a farmer's wife, as a farmer's daughter, as a nurse, an office worker, a carpet factory worker and a dance teacher. There is gossip and hint of scandal, reprimands and reprisals, tales of dancing for royalty, skating in the moonlight, fiancés on the frontline and how to feed 100 chickens while on rations.

Created by Francesca Millican-Slater, *My Dearest Girls: The Letters Book* uses live music with traces of music hall and folk to help tell the story of the women.

Credits

Researched, Written and Performed by	Francesca Millican-Slater
Music developed by	Francesca Millican-Slater & Phill Ward
Live musical accompaniment from	Phill Ward or Dan Haywood
Directed By	Terina Talbot
Designed by	Claire Browne
Produced by	Pippa Frith
Commissioned by	Arts Alive & Shropshire Archives
Supported by	Pentabus Theatre

Helen's Story:

Francesca Millican-Slater creates a brand new piece based on the real letters sent between a group of six Shropshire women between 1917-1920. Against a background of war the women tell each other stories of their everyday life; as farmers, office workers, factory hands, nurses and teachers.

Helen's story tells the tale of one of the women; a farmer's daughter in Much Wenlock. Through Helen's own words we hear about women working on the land, the impact of the war on family and farm and her own for wait for news from The Front.

Credits

Researched, Written and Performed by	Francesca Millican-Slater
Original Concept Direction by	Elizabeth freestone
Produced by	Pippa Frith
Commissioned by	Arts Alive & Shropshire Archives
Supported by	Pentabus Theatre



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RESPONSES TO THE WORK



“It’s a wonderful way of telling the barely touchable, off-stage story of the Great War.”
Chris Eldon-Lee, Virtual Shropshire

“Thought-provoking, funny, richly-textured, closely-observed and very satisfying, this play, and rural touring productions generally”
Tim Cara, Dornham Times

“A captivating performance given by Francesca Millican-

Slater, full of detail and nuance which held the audience’s attention and curiosity throughout. It was a well-crafted insight into the lives of some everyday folk.”
AAA Music

“It was a brilliant story. It couldn’t get any better than it was. It was nice to hear some humour in it. Out of 1,000,000 I’d rate it...1,000,000! REALLY, I’M NOT KIDDING!!!!!!”
Sam, Age 9, Audience member at the Heart of Norfolk

"Really brought characters to life - spine-tingling"
Audience Member,
Bridgenorth Library

“A coruscating mixture of poetry, song, drama and life telling. I was carried away into the lives of the young women, beautifully voiced and portrayed with sympathetic resonance”
Peter Thompson, Audience member, Kings Lynn



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MARKETING INFORMATION



My Dearest Girls has been specifically been developed and designed for rural touring audiences and venues, although across the centenary we have also toured the work to theatres and arts centres in urban contexts.

It particularly speaks to women, audiences interested in social history, WW1, rural histories and communities as well as those particularly interested in archives.

For all touring venues we will provide the following marketing materials / support:

- A pre-agreed quantity of flyers and posters designed for overprinting
- Access to a range of production images
- Access to show trailer:
<https://vimeo.com/124907787>
- Draft press release for local issue
- Support with e-marketing including e-flyers and social media content





PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The Letters Book:

Minimum playing space:
approximately 4 metres by 4
metres (please contact the
producers to discuss any
concerns)

Running time: 1 hour 45
(including 20 minute interval)

Sound requirements: we will
require access to the venue PA
wherever possible, but will
provide laptop, mixer and other
equipment required for sound
and live music. If a PA is not available alternative arrangements can be negotiated with the
Producer.



Lighting Requirement: we use a basic rig to create a sense of theatre, but the lighting requirements are minimal. Where possible we use in-house lighting provision, but can also tour with our own lighting equipment.

The show tours with 3 on the road: Performer, Production Manager and Musician.



Helen's Story:

Minimum playing space: 1 metre
by 1 metre

Running time: 30 minutes (can be
repeated up to 3 times a day)

Set Requirements: We request
wherever possible the venue
provide a simple chair and table (if
this represents issues please contact
the Producer to discuss).

This show tours with 2 on the road: 1 performer and 1 assistant





Previous Touring

My Dearest Girls has been touring since 2014, and has toured to a wide range of venues and areas including:

- Extensive touring across Arts Alive Rural Touring Network, Shropshire
- Spot on, Lancashire Rural Touring
- Live & Local,
- The Festival at The Edge, Shropshire
- Shrewsbury Folk Festival
- mac birmingham
- Ludlow Assembly Rooms
- NRTF New Directions Conference, 2014 (York)
- Creative Arts East, Rural Touring across Norfolk and Suffolk
- Notts, Lincs, Leicestershire Rural Touring
- Arts Out West Rural Touring, West Cumbria
- Arts S'oak Festival, Sellyoak, Birmingham

Contact

For bookings and further information please contact Producer:

Pippafrith@gmail.com | 07500 015298 | www.pippadoesproducing.wordpress.com | @Pippa_Frith

Artist Contact: franms@mac.com | www.francescamillicanslater.co.uk | @FranMillicanS



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BIOGRAPHIES

Francesca Millican-Slater – Artist

Francesca Millican-Slater is a writer and performer that tells stories directly to you. A lot of the stories are true, things have happened, steeped in history, though sometimes she makes things up. Just for fun.

In 2016 Francesca created *Stories to Tell in the Middle of the Night*, commissioned by Birmingham Rep. 'Stories to tell' is a series of short, quirky, dark tales told live to an audience that follows the pattern of a sleepless night. The show played to critical acclaim at Edinburgh 2016, and was followed by a two-week run at Birmingham Rep in January 2017, continuing to tour the West Midlands in hospices, schools, and community centres as part of the prestigious Sir Barry Jackson Tour.

Francesca is currently working on a project commissioned by Warwickshire County Council researching the extensive archives of Hatton County Asylum. She is also part of team creating *Fair Field* a series of performances re-staging the 14th century poem Piers Plowman at Ledbury Poetry Festival and Shoreditch Town Hall.

During 2015 and 2016 Francesca was artist in residence at the National Waterways Museum, in Ellesmere Port, working across 10 months to create a performance based on retracing the steps of a historic 66 mile canal walk, as well as working closely with museum staff and volunteers to explore creative ways of telling the story of the museum. In 2015 she was commissioned by The New Vic Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, to create a new piece: Gold! as part of their Staffordshire Hoard Festival. Gold! was an investigation into what that precious metal means to us now and what it has always meant to us.

In 2014 Francesca premiered *The Forensics of a Flat* (and other stories) produced by Pippa Frith in association with Birmingham Repertory Theatre, followed by a national preview tour. 'The Forensics' charted her investigation into the history of the flat she lived in and it's area in suburban Birmingham while her landlord held karaoke parties downstairs.

Also in 2014, she created two brand new work's *My Dearest Girls: The Letters Book* and *My Dearest Girls: Helen's Story* based on the letters sent between a group of Shropshire women between 1917-1920. Commissioned by Arts Alive and Shropshire Archives, this duo of performances has been touring across Shropshire and nationally and will continue to do so until 2018 marking the centenary of WW1.





Francesca's piece *Me, Myself and Miss Gibbs* toured nationally throughout 2012 - 2015 after its critical success at Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2011, with over 100 performances to date.

Christmas 2015, she was 'Mother Christmas' as part of Kiln Ensemble and Birmingham REP's 'Dirty Grotto'. In 2016 she was performer for *Feast of the Dead* created by Dens & Signal to mark 950 year of the battle of Hastings. In 2012 and 2013 she was a deviser / performer for Jane Packman Company on 'The Wake.'

www.francescamillicanslater.co.uk

TERINA TALBOT (THE LETTERS BOOK DIRECTOR)

Terina Studied Community Theatre at Liverpool Polytechnic in the late 70's and then a degree in Drama & Theatre Arts at Birmingham University in the early 1980s.

She has over 30-years experience of working as an actor, director and teacher/facilitator - both in a freelance capacity and as a part of a company at various times - making drama and theatre about social change and things that 'matter' to people.

She was an actor/teacher and director with 'Big Brum TIE Company' for many years working on many original Theatre in Education programmes for young people of all ages in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

For 'Women & Theatre' she worked as a performer / director and facilitator with many different community groups - Women within the Probation Service; Older adults in residential and day care services; looked-after young people and young people within the care system; Service Users within mental health settings.

For 'The Hearth Centre' - she has worked as a director and performer and currently sits on the company board of management. For InteRact she has been a 'reader' - with people who have experienced strokes and head injuries.

She has in the past been a Visiting Lecturer at Wolverhampton, BCU and Newman Universities. She is currently employed at the Birmingham School of Acting as a Lecturer/ Tutor on the Applied Performance degree course, working with the next generation of Applied Performance practitioners. She also 'facilitates' four children - in a variety of ongoing projects!

ELIZABETH FREESTONE (HELEN'S STORY CONCEPT DIRECTOR)

Most recently Elizabeth has returned to her freelance practice, splitting her time between New York and Stratford-upon-Avon, but she has spent the last 5 years as Artistic Director of





Pentabus Theatre. During her tenure at Pentabus her directing credits include *Each Slow Dust*, *Milked*, *Here I belong* and *Once* among others.

She has a long standing relationship with the Royal Shakespeare Company, most recently directing critical success *The Rape of Lucrece*, and previously has directed *Here Lies Mary Spindler* and *The Tragedy of William Hobbe*. She has directed *Romeo and Juliet* at the Globe, London. She has wide credits across a range of work and theatres nationally, radio and literally work.

She trained at the National Theatre Studio and Rose Bruford College where she has a BA Hons in Directing (First Class).

CLAIRE BROWNE (SET DESIGN)

Claire is a Theatre Designer based in Birmingham. Since graduating from Nottingham Trent University six years ago she has designed for theatre companies such as York Theatre Royal ('Little Angels'), Out Of Chaos ('Macbeth' and 'Unmythable') and 509 arts ('Sing and Louder Sing'). She has also collaborated as designer with local artists such as Demi Nandhra ('Life is No Laughing Matter'), Francesca Millican Slater ('Stories to Tell in the Middle of the Night', and 'My Dearest Girls') and Untied Artists ('For Their Own Good').

In 2015 Claire was commissioned to design and build an installation as part of the 'Other World Wardrobes Tour' by Birmingham REP and Birmingham Libraries. You'll soon be able to experience this wardrobe again as a permanent installation in Perry Common Library, Birmingham. Claire is currently working with 'The Bone Ensemble' designing a new show called 'Where's my Igloo Gone?'

PIPPA FRITH (PRODUCER)

Pippa Frith is an Independent Producer based in Birmingham. She works with artists to create art that aims to surprise and delight audiences nationally and internationally. She is passionate about working in the regions to create new work of high quality, showcase new voices and grow new audiences. Her primary background is theatre, although she also has experience of Spoken Word Outdoor Circus work), Visual Arts / Performance Crossover and cross-media projects.

Pippa is Festival Producer for Fierce Festival, Birmingham's international festival of Live Art. She is the long-term producer for celebrated solo artist Francesca Millican-Slater (Me, Myself and Miss Gibbs, supported by mac birmingham; The Forensics of a Flat, in association with Birmingham REP; My Dearest Girls, commissioned by Shropshire Archives and Arts Alive), GOLD (commissioned by the New Vic Theatre). She co-produced The Road to Huntsville (Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2016) and Unknown Male, both by Stephanie Ridings with Birmingham REP in January 2015, winning the Peter Brook / Mark Marvin Award for the





project.

She was Co-Producer of *Our Fathers* (Babakas, commissioned by Warwick Arts Centre, mac birmingham and China Plate), supporting the work through two national tours, a number of international dates and a critically acclaimed Edinburgh Festival Fringe run (2013). She is also Co-Director of well-loved work-in-progress platform PILOT Nights.

She has been a visiting lecturer at The University of Birmingham and Birmingham School of Acting and regularly mentors emerging producers and young artists and companies. Before developing her producing portfolio Pippa worked as Project Manager for Women & Theatre (Birmingham), as a Programmer at the Drum Arts Centre; was Project Manager of The Decibel Performing Arts Showcase 2007 and for Fierce Earth, working on a range of projects included Fierce! Festival. She studied Contemporary Arts, majoring in Theatre and Live Art at Manchester Metropolitan University.

www.pippafrith.co.uk



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