

INTRODUCING... OUI Performance's 12-hour presentation of the work of performance artist Alastair MacLennan in York tomorrow



Marathon stint

INNOVATIVE York arts organisation OUI Performance – that's 'OUI' as in French for 'yes' – has invited performance artist Alastair MacLennan to York St John University to premiere his 12-hour marathon entitled Note Tone, as part of the York Festival of Ideas and York 800 celebrations.

Tomorrow's event will be staged in Quad South Hall, the former chapel accessible and signposted from Lord Mayor's Walk, as part of Action Art Now, a series of performances arranged by curators and directors Victoria Gray & Nathan Walker.

Supported by Arts Council England, OUI Performance has brought 30 national and international artists to perform in York since 2010. Alastair MacLennan, Emeritus Professor at the University of Ulster, is their biggest coup so far, as Victoria and Nathan tell CHARLES HUTCHINSON

Why should people spend at least part of their day tomorrow watching this free event, Nathan?

"This is an important event in the city's cultural landscape and shows a huge development in the diversity of York's contemporary art scene. We're delighted to be working with the York Festival of Ideas, York800 Festival and York St John University to produce this event.

"OUI Performance are dedicated to broadening the city's cultural activities and making these accessible to everyone."

Why call your company OUI Performance, Victoria?

"Our work is not in French, but the name means Yes Performance, which is a positive start for a performance company."

Give a potted history of OUI Performance, Nathan.

"We started in February 2010 at Space 109, the community arts centre in Walmgate. We had nine performances in one evening all happening simultaneously in the one space with different visual artists, including us, from London, Liverpool, Bristol and York, doing sound, video and live performances.

"We already had some form of relationship with each of them, having either met them, seen them or worked with them.

"That first show was Arts Council funded and we've since had two more grants from the Arts Council, the latest being for this new show."

What is your back story, Nathan?

"I'm from Cumbria, the West Coast, Workington, and studied at York St John and then did a masters degree in performance at Dartington College of Arts in Devon. Afterwards, I came back north and joined the York St John staff as part of the theatre department and that's where Victoria and I met."

Victoria, your story?

"I'm from Newcastle and trained in contemporary dance at the

Northern School of Contemporary Dance in Leeds. Then I lectured in dance at York St John University and I also did my MA in performance there.

"I'm now doing a PhD at Chelsea College of Art, studying performance within a fine art context."

What does your OUI Performance project involve, Nathan?

"We programme artists who might make videos or sculptures, but we programme them to make performances."

Explain how that will work in Alastair MacLennan's performance tomorrow, Victoria.

"You might think of it as a live installation that will evolve throughout the performance, or you could think of it as a live sculpture."

For the uninitiated, Nathan, who is Alastair MacLennan?

"He's based in Northern Ireland, in Belfast, but originally he's from Blair Atholl, which is where my mother is from incidentally. He's one of the most well respected and renowned performance artists of the last decade, well, actually since the Seventies."

Have you worked with him previously, Victoria?

"Yes, we've met him at a number of different performance events and in 2010 we went to meet him in Belfast at a performance exchange.

"We've had dialogue with him

since then and always wanted to bring him to York but we wanted it to be a longer working relationship, a longer project, so we've been working on this show for a year and a half."

Describe Note Tone in a nutshell, Victoria,

"Alastair wanted very specific things for it: 12 baths, 12 identical chairs, 12 very large tree branches, which we sourced from Aborwise, a York-based tree surgery, who were cutting down a tree at Tang Hall Primary School.

"He also wanted lots of compost, 28 bags of it, which we've got from Yorkwaste, as were the baths.

"Alastair has asked for 12 people to take part in his performance piece, who we've sourced from the university's students, staff and past students. They'll be given their instructions today – but we still don't know what they'll be.

"That's one of those things he believes is important so that he can change it."

In other words, you will; have to watch his space tomorrow, from 9am, to find out more.

• OUI Performance presents Alastair MacLennan in Note Tone, Quad South Hall, York St John University, tomorrow, 9am to 9pm. The performance is free and the audience may come and go throughout the day. More information can be found at ouiperformance.org.uk