

**EARTH
FALL**

**at
swim
two
boys**

Study Pack



Photos: Huga Glendinning 2005/06

Welcome to the Earthfall Study Pack

This study pack has been designed for students and teachers alike, to give an insight into the themes and choreographic devices used to create *At Swim Two Boys*, a performance exploring the developing relationship between two young men during Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916.



Contents

Page 3	Introduction Earthfall At Swim Two Boys
Page 4	Current Performers
Page 5-8	Choreographic Devices Pockets Rocks Side by side Pal o' My Heart
Page 9	Performance Text
Page 10-12	Research Tasks
Page 13	Contact Details

INTRODUCTION

Earthfall was formed in 1989 by Jessica Cohen and Jim Ennis with a policy of forging radical choreography with live music and strong visual imagery. The company rapidly established itself as an outstanding exponent of pioneering dance theatre. Earthfall's issue based work is concerned with seeking a personal honesty, passion and economy in physical performance to produce quality work with depth. Earthfall has performed throughout the world in many major festivals and has featured on numerous TV and Radio broadcasts. The company has received several awards for its live performance and film work, including the BAFTA Cymru Award winner for Best Short Film for *Too Old To Dream*, a BAFTA Cymru nomination for Best Short Film in 2010 for *Gravitas Postcards*, and a Theatre in Wales Award for Best Dance/Physical Theatre in 2006 for *At Swim Two Boys*.



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06

At Swim Two Boys is an adaption of **Jamie O'Neill's** award winning novel of the same name. Set in Ireland in 1916, the work juxtaposes the developing love affair between two young men with the political turmoil in Ireland and the slaughter on the Western Front – contrasting the dream of national liberation and the search for personal freedom. Staged in a gradually filling lake in front of a slow falling waterfall, the live action, combined with the defused images that reflect back, evoke an incredible emotional power. *At Swim Two Boys* incorporates extreme physicality, live music, live and archive film footage and voice over text from the author.

At Swim Two Boys, which was first created and performed in 2004, is the company's second collaboration with Jamie O'Neill, the first being a commission, from the UK Year of literature, Swansea, to write three monologues and other texts for Earthfall's work *forever and ever*.

With the creation of *At Swim Two Boys* Earthfall's aim is not to reproduce a 600-page novel for live performance, but to abstract a single strand of the complex narrative; focusing in on the relationship between the two boys within the novel. Within this concept, episodes from the book have been distilled, woven together and reinvented in the company's own interpretation. Essentially, it is an evocative love story with a poignantly tragic end.

*"Violence, tenderness, passion and humour collide
in this super, charged performance"*

The Times

CURRENT PERFORMERS

Murilo Leite

Murilo was born in Brazil and introduced to dance by Marcia Lot. He relocated to England in 1996 and at the age of 16 co-founded Re*Flex Dance Company under the guidance of RJC Dance. Alongside his dance training at City of Bristol College (University of Plymouth), he performed with The Movement Collective, in a regional tour with Neshima Dance Company and taught community classes in Brazil. Murilo went on to complete his training at Middlesex University and graduated with a First Class Honours in 2011. He has also performed at the Bristol Harbourside Festival three years running in exclusive commissions for Adam Hougland (Louisville Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet), the aforementioned companies, and Julia Thorneycroft.

Daniel Connor

Daniel grew up in Ellesmere Port, Cheshire. He started dancing aged 14 and joined Cheshire Youth Dance Company appearing in Youth Dance England performances at The Birmingham Hippodrome and The Lowry, Salford Quays. Aged 18 Daniel went to Middlesex University before transferring to The Northern School of Contemporary Dance to undertake his professional training. Daniel graduated from NSCD in 2010 and was awarded NSCD's annual performance prize. He then went on to become a member of Verve11, the post graduate performance company of NSCD, and graduated with distinction in July 2011.

Frank Naughton

Frank has composed and performed with Earthfall on their last five productions. He is a multi instrumentalist, his main instruments being guitar, vocals and keyboards. Frank is a founder and performer with the band Rocketgoldstar he has also performed with Nemesis and Thighpaulsandra and featured in two 'Peel sessions'. Other credits include playing on the world's longest double A side single (12 hours) and performing the world's first silent gig.

Sion Orgon

Sion has composed and performed with Earthfall on their last three productions. He is the founder and member of the band Rocketgoldstar. Sion specialises on drums, vocals, guitar and synths. He does session work for Cardiacs Keyboard player William D Drake and Welsh language artist Geriant Jarman. He played on a studio album with Tim Lewis (aka Thighpaulsandra, from Spiritualised, Coil and Julian Cope) and Alessandro Cortini who plays with Muse. When he is not playing he works in the studio mastering albums for various record companies. He has also made 3 solo albums.

Artistic Team - Artistic directors: Jessica Cohen and Jim Ennis | Original Music composed by: Roger Mills and Frank Naughton with additional composition for the 2011 version by Sion Orgon | Environment and lighting Designed by: Gerald Tyler | Sound by: Felix Otaola | Film by: Jim Ennis and Steve Vernecombe | Technical director: Gerald Tyler | Vision mixing: Steve Vernecombe | Photography: Hugo Glendinning

CHOREOGRAPHIC DEVICES

Choreographic Devices: methods applied to create, change and/or develop a movement phrase

Pockets

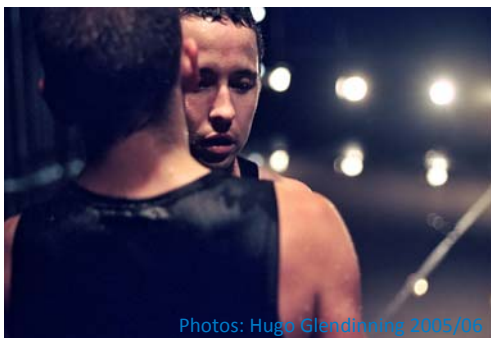
This choreographic section draws from descriptions in the novel of how the friendship between the two boys began. It expresses their attraction to each other and their realisation that their feelings are far stronger than a regular friendship. It expresses their fear of their own emotionality and the fear that was deeply instilled in them culturally in that period of time. Here the context is important i.e. homosexuality was not only considered sinful in terms of the Catholic Doctrine but also a serious imprisonable offence. (See the trial of Oscar Wilde and his work *the Ballad of Reading Jail*).

Two dancers with their hands in their pockets walk side by side. They circle one another, weaving in and out of each other avoiding eye contact. There is a strong feeling of tension, and an intimate concentration between their bodies. They accidentally touch. They stop. They look at each other. They walk away.

Through extensive improvisation the artistic team were able to translate this particular narrative the following minimalist choreographic formula:

- Keep hands in pockets at all times
- Move around each other in a careful sensitive way on one spot
- Circle and weave in and out of each other, very closely, but making sure not to touch
- Build up the moves in tempo, changing direction frequently
- Touch by accident
- Feel this accidental touch as a subtle electric shock
- Stop still and catch each other's eyes
- Walk away from each other at least five paces
- Hold this moment then look and catch each other's eyes
- Stride towards each other to meet again in another area of space

This was repeated 5 times with variations. We added changes in dynamics, slowing down or even pausing for a moment to increase the tension, or speeding up a particular movement. A range of levels were introduced whilst weaving in and out of each other. The dancers could decide to stay longer in the accidental touch, or give some weight to one another within this, for example resting the head on the other dancer's shoulder.



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06

CHOREOGRAPHIC DEVICES

Rocks

This choreographic section draws from descriptions in the novel of the times the boys go down to the sea to swim. The mood is tranquil and playful.

To construct the choreography we imagined a series of rocks rising out of the shallow waters. The boys jump as far as they are able from one rock to the other. They follow each other so that the invisible rocky landscape begins to make some kind of logical pattern. It is not important that the audience understand the internal story, the intention will communicate itself in a semi abstract way, and choreographically it is about running leaping, and landing.

While creating this choreography we chalked out areas in the space to make sure the rocks remained in the same location. We also gave a thick texture to the air to add a resistance to the body in the recovery from the leap. The two boys jumped at the same time one arriving on the rock as the other left.

To add variation to the choreography we allowed one boy to catch up with the other so that they must balance together on the one small rock. We also included one large rock where they were able to lie together and rest for a moment.



CHOREOGRAPHIC DEVICES

Side by Side

One of the major events in the novel is when the boys embark on the long swim. They have spent a year practicing and preparing for this challenge. The swim takes them out from Dublin Bay to a small island where they raise their own flag as conquerors. They arrive exhausted and emotional. This is the moment they make love for the first time. Our choreographic section portrays some moments later as they lie in the sun on the rocks to dry off and doze.

Initially the choreography is as minimal as sleeping but we abstract it and have both boys move in total synchronisation. It is gentle, meditative and gestural. After a while we allow the boys to individualise their movement which enables them to distinguish their characters. However, all the gestures and moves are understated and subtle.

The physical parameters for this section are to lie side by side, the largest moves can roll them on to their sides or enable them to sit up.

'They had this together now. They had their island. Whenever a thought crossed or a look met, if a hair but brushed a finger, this was where they would be. No one could take it from them....'

Narrative used to inform
Side by Side choreography



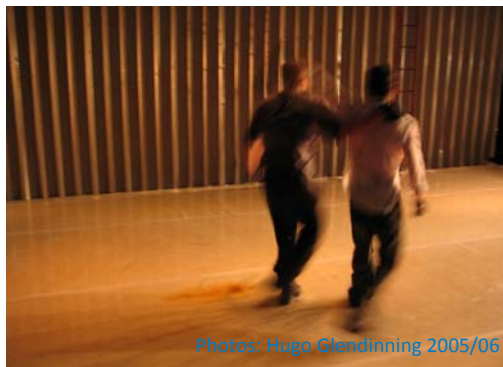
CHOREOGRAPHIC DEVICES



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06

Pal o' My Heart

This is an up tempo section expressing the friendship between the two boys. Although they were friends as children one of them moved away. The relationship is then picked up again some years later when they are in their mid teens. This section of choreography makes reference to the point when the boys meet up again and renew their friendship.



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06

The choreographic parameters used for this device involve crossing the breadth of the space arm in arm. Fast physical sequences were created using the following formula:



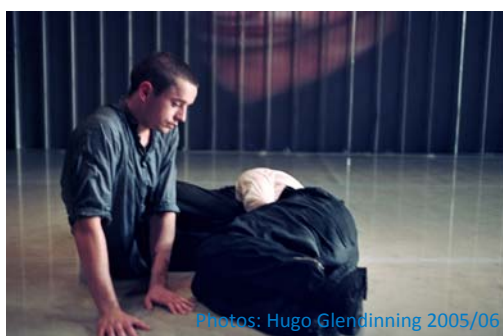
Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06

- Arm over each other's shoulders
- Arms around each other's waist
- Pushing each other's arms away
- Tucking an arm under or over the other's
- Ducking a head under the other's arm
- Weaving in and out



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06

These were repeated with variations. We added glancing lifts and little tussles. The dancers devoured the space, executing the lifts while advancing in the space and changing direction.



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06

PERFORMANCE TEXT

Excerpts from the novel *At Swim Two Boys* by Jamie O'Neill

'Grey morning dulled the bay. Banks of clouds, Howth just one more bank, rolled to sea, where other Howths grumbled to greet them. Swollen spumeless tide. Heads that bobbed like floating gulls and gulls like floating bobbed like heads. Two heads. At swim, two boys.'



"Are we ready to go to the forty foot?"

Doyler looked round as though the rocks would decide him.

"Said you'd never been. Thought to show you was all."

"It'll be dark soon."

A flash of his grin. "I'll see you won't fall in," he said and the arm went round Jim's shoulder. Gently this time, though still the touch shot through Jim's cloths, through his skin even. It was this way whenever their bodies met, if limping they brushed against him or laughing he squeezed his arm. The touch charged through like a sputtering tram-wire until it wasn't Doyler he felt but what Doyler touched, which was himself. This is my shoulder, this my leg. And he did not think he had felt himself before, other than in pain or in sin.'

Narrative used to inform pockets choreography

RESEARCH TASKS

Homosexuality is a key theme within the performance. In 1916 homosexuality was widely considered an unnatural act, that strongly went against the Catholic Doctrine. It was also a serious imprisonable offence.

Are any of these issues concerning homosexuality mirrored in today's society?

How have views concerning homosexuality changed through the 20th and 21st century?



Photos: Hugo Glendinning 2005/06

CONTACT DETAILS

For more information, please contact us on:

Earthfall

Chapter
Market Road
Cardiff
CF5 1QE

029 20 22 13 14

www.earthfall.org.uk

For more information on *At Swim Two Boys*
visit the official mini-site at:

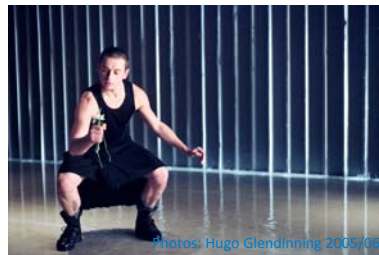
www.atswimtwoboys.com

You can also follow us on:

Facebook and Twitter

Feedback on your participation experiences at:

<http://on.fb.me/fboutreach>



Photos taken from original 2004 production
Extracts used from novel with permission from the author