

Be Silent or Be Killed

Scottish Tour – May 2013.

Introduction

Be Silent or Be Killed is based on the book of the same name by North-East businessman Roger Hunt and Kenny Kemp.

In November 2008, Roger set off from his home in Macduff destined for India to set up a new project for the Royal Bank of Scotland in the country's financial capital Mumbai. Shortly after his arrival Roger became caught up in a deadly terrorist attack which claimed the lives of many innocent people. For 40 hours, Roger lay hidden and alone in his hotel bedroom as terrorists moved from floor to floor seeking Western targets. Amazingly, he was able to communicate via his BlackBerry with colleagues in RBS headquarters in Edinburgh and it was this support, along with Roger's calculated decision-making, personal resilience and determination to survive that led to his eventual rescue.

Be Silent or Be Killed concerns the impact of international terrorism on the individual and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

Background to the Project

Writers Euan Martin and Dave Smith were inspired to adapt Roger Hunt's book for the stage following a meeting with journalist Kenny Kemp. It was decided at an early stage that this show required a major audio-visual input and the involvement of sound and video designers at the outset would inform the development of the play.

An initial approach to National Theatre of Scotland resulted in an award to hold a two day development workshop at Eden Court in October 2011 involving the writers Euan Martin and Dave Smith, Director Ian Grieve, Sound Designer Dave Martin, Video Designer John McGeoch and three actors, Robbie Jack, Garry Collins and Helen Mackay. Thereafter, an application was prepared for Creative Scotland and thanks to a major award via the Quality Arts Productions strand, plus sponsorship from The Fire Training Group and additional support via Arts & Business Scotland, full funding was in place to organise a production and tour in the Spring of 2013.

Cast

The production featured a very talented cast including Ewan Donald, Helen Mackay and James Mackenzie. Initially, Macduff actor Fraser Sivewright had been cast in the main role, but due to an unfortunate accident, Fraser was unable to continue with rehearsals and James Mackenzie was recruited at very short notice. He deserves credit for slotting into the production very easily and displayed great enthusiasm and dedication to the task.

Production Team

The script for *Be Silent or Be Killed* was written by **Euan Martin and Dave Smith**. The production was directed by **Ian Grieve**, Sound Designer was **Dave Martin** and Video Designer was **John McGeoch**.

Stage Management, Lighting and Sound responsibilities were undertaken by **Mick Andrew** and **Brian Gorman**.

The Set was designed by **John McGeoch** and built by **Andy Blake**. Costumes were organised by **Kay Smith** and all administration duties were carried out by **HI-Arts** team in conjunction with producers **Euan Martin** and **Dave Smith** of **Right Lines Productions**.

Publicity design was provided by **Emma Quinn** and the Marketing, press and publicity plan was organised by **Liz Smith** in tandem with **Euan Martin**. Rehearsal and Production photography was carried out by **Callum Mackay** from *Ross-shire.net* and **Euan Martin**. **Arts In Motion** filmed a performance of the show at the One Touch theatre, Eden Court on Saturday 4th May 2013.

Artistic Quality

We were able to attain a high standard of artistic quality in terms of the script, direction, video, set and sound design by employing experienced theatre professionals to undertake these tasks.

By employing well-established young actors, one of whom had been involved in the original development workshop, plus the above-mentioned production team, we were able to retain some consistency and move the new production onto a stronger footing. Right Lines offered good wage rates, all above the Equity minimum, plus an attractive package of touring allowances, accommodation and transport arranged and pre-paid by the company. As a result, we were able to contract talented individuals who brought tremendous skill to the production. This allowed Right Lines to make the best use of a compact company and permit the actors to play to their strengths. Similarly, the Director was a well-established practitioner who had worked with Right Lines previously.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals took place at Arts in Motion in Evanton for one week, followed by two weeks in the One Touch Theatre, Eden Court. This allowed the company to rehearse in the space the show was to open which allowed a smooth transition from rehearsal, to preview to the first night. The facilities at both Arts In Motion and Eden Court were excellent and Right Lines would definitely seek to repeat these arrangements for future productions.

Tour

The opening night of the tour and World Premiere took place at One Touch Theatre, Eden Court on Friday 3rd May 2013. The following night, Roger Hunt and his wife Irene attended the performance in the same venue and Roger participated in the first of three post-show Question and Answer forums. This was a really successful additional feature of the production and the audience questioned Roger for 40 minutes at the end of the show. We felt this extended period of engagement reflected the audience's interest and enthusiasm for the story and they obviously appreciated the opportunity to discuss Roger's experiences with him first hand.

Following the first 3 shows in Inverness, the tour continued to venues in the Central Belt. It was a specific company aim with this tour to seek bookings in mid-scale theatres across Scotland, as opposed to concentrating the majority of the dates in the Highlands and North-East. Consequently, we visited 8 venues where the company had not performed previously.

The first week on the road involved visits to The Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh, Perth Theatre, Cumbernauld theatre and FTH Falkirk. At the beginning on the second week, we took in the studio theatre space at the newly-opened Beacon Arts centre in Greenock, a very interesting venue at Summerhall in Edinburgh (the Demonstration Room with a capacity of 50), the newly-opened Cottiers Theatre at Kelvinbridge, followed by Carnegie hall, Dunfermline and Rothes Hall studio Theatre in Glenrothes.

The final week of the tour moved to Moray for a very successful date at the Universal Hall, Findhorn, back to the Central Belt for a show in Paisley Arts Centre and then the concluding two dates were at The Lemon Tree in Aberdeen. In all we performed Be Silent or Be Killed on 17 occasions throughout the tour.

Public Benefit & Demand

Be Silent or Be Killed was a departure for Right Lines in that it was the first time the company had adapted an existing work for the theatre. Then demands on the script writers were even more challenging as this was the true story of a survivor's experience of international terrorism. We involved Roger Hunt at a very early stage and received his approval for the project to proceed. He cooperated with the project throughout and he was an invaluable source of information and advice.

Although Be Silent is one man's story, it also has general themes which broadened the appeal of the show. We were intrigued by the fact that a very ordinary, down to earth businessman from the North-East of Scotland could become involved in such a major international terrorist incident. We were also intrigued by the way Roger drew on his "ordinary" background and indeed the personal tragedy that had befallen his own family to help him survive the ordeal. In essence, Be Silent focused on the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity and as such offered a specific Scottish perspective on a universal theme.

The performances in Inverness were very well-attended and by the time the tour reached Findhorn and Aberdeen the venues were sold out. However, it has to be noted that the

dates in the Central Belt were not as well-attended as had been hoped.

Publicity and Marketing

There could have been a number of explanations for low attendances, but it was certainly not due to lack of publicity by the company. The posters and flyers for the tour were designed by Emma Quinn and provided a really strong image. 20,000 flyers and approximately 1000 A3 and A4 posters were distributed to venues and promoters. The same design was used for the 8-page A5 programme which we distributed free of charge at all venues. The use of an experienced designer was a great advantage as she created an image that was instantly recognisable and easily transferable to all printed publicity material. It was also used for an e-flyer which was circulated to email contact lists by Right Lines, cast, crew and everyone else associated with the project.

We employed Liz Smith to develop the marketing of Be Silent or Be Killed and she secured articles, previews and reviews of the show in a large number of local and national newspapers including The Times, The Press & Journal, The Herald, The Scotsman, The Courier, The Inverness Courier, The Daily Record, Forres Gazette, Northern Scot The Perthshire Advertiser and many other local papers. She compiled a Press cuttings document which runs to 40 A4 pages.

It was unquestionably the correct move to employ a dedicated professional Marketing and Publicity person with extremely good connections and media contacts. This campaign succeeded in raising awareness of the project within the Scottish theatre community and throughout the general population to a much higher level than would have been possible otherwise.

There was an overspend on Marketing costs compared to the original budget and this was due to our decision, with the recommendation of Perth, to pay for a mail out to their audience as there were few presales for this performance. Also we had additional printing and design costs to include logos due to the schedule of sponsorship decisions. We also increased our print run to maximise our publicity. There were smaller factors e.g. the need to print and insert additional material into the programme, after the change of cast member, and the creation of an online version of the programme with a QR code access.

Roger Hunt was interviewed on the "John Beattie Show" on BBC Radio Scotland on Tuesday 30th April, Euan Martin was interviewed by Janice Forsyth on BBC Radio Scotland's "Culture Studio" on Wednesday 1st May and the play was featured by both STV and BBC Scotland on their flagship teatime news programmes.

Facebook & Social Networking

Right Lines used Facebook and Twitter as marketing tools and many messages of support and comments on the show were left on the Facebook page (Right Lines) and twitter (RightLinesPro). Rehearsal and production photos were also uploaded onto the Facebook page.

Acknowledgement of Funders

Right Lines Productions is extremely grateful to all funders, sponsors and supporters who have combined to make this production and tour a reality. In particular, **The National Theatre of Scotland** for the initial development support, **Creative Scotland** for the Quality Arts Productions investment, **The Fire Training Group** for sponsorship support, **HI-Arts Ltd**, for in-kind administrative support, **Eden Court** and **Arts In Motion** for in-kind rehearsal space support. We also received additional support from **Arts & Business Scotland**.

All publicity and press releases indicated that the production was supported by Creative Scotland, and other supporters and sponsors. In addition, we had pop-up banners made clearly displaying the show publicity image and all the funders.

Audience Response & Feedback

We invited the audiences at all venues to indicate their views on the show through various methods. There was an insert in all programmes which were distributed free of charge at all venues and a large number of audience feedback comments were gathered in this way. Comments were also received via Facebook, Twitter, email and on the website, plus a small number of text messages. Word of mouth responses were numerous, warm and almost universally positive!

Project Assessment

The May 2013 tour of *Be Silent or Be Killed* has been a successful project which we believe has been organised with skill and professionalism. As we had hoped, Right Lines has demonstrated that the company is capable of securing adequate funding to write, produce and tour new theatre to target audiences and deliver a show of high artistic quality on time and on budget.

We feel the production appealed to our audience in the Highlands & Islands and North-East that we have established over a number of years. In addition, the strength of the audience feedback comments suggest that we have also managed to appeal to new audiences across the country and raise the profile of the company. Consequently, we believe we have satisfactorily fulfilled the criteria set by the project funders at the same time as maintaining our commitment to making original and innovative theatre.

Euan Martin. Right Lines Productions – July 2013.