

# Generating New Forms of Theatrical Expression



## RESEARCHERS

Dr Mike Brookes  
Professor Mike Pearson

## THE OVERVIEW

*ILIAD (2015)* was a large-scale, internationally acknowledged theatre production created by Dr Mike Brookes and the late Professor Mike Pearson (1949–2022), commissioned by National Theatre Wales (NTW). It realised a verbatim, multimedia staging of the entirety of Christopher Logue's epic poem 'War Music'; the first time Logue's text had been staged in full. The production expanded the ways epic narrative poetry might resonate with, and be performed in, the contemporary cultural context. *ILIAD* offered audiences an immersive and expansive eleven-hour theatre experience within a modern auditorium; and informed creative, technical and administrative procedures for located theatre practices.



## THE RESEARCH

Dr Brookes and Professor Pearson's long-term scholarly and practice-based research underpinned the conceptual and creative work on *ILIAD*. The work included their reflections on practical methodologies for, and critical and theoretical approaches to, site-specific performance and located performance making. The development of *ILIAD* marked a turning point, applying these approaches within 'traditional' theatre auditoria staging and production processes.

This expanded the authors' research into located and site-specific theatre practices by addressing the specificity of the theatre as a site itself, and in particular the new and developing Ffwrnes theatre auditorium in Llanelli, South Wales, and its possible spatial configurations and uses, as well as its potential functions as a cultural centre in context.

This led to new multimedia approaches to the staging of poetic text, the collaborative development of project-specific cinematographic and video production practices, the construction of spatially active audio architectures and vocal techniques appropriate for the complex media environment of the work.

The work brought together a select team of expert and emerging practitioners, both local and international, and was supported by Dr Brookes and Professor Pearson's extensive experience of professional production. It was also informed by Dr Brookes' extensive practice-based research within intermedial, located live and public art work, which has been widely commissioned and presented across Europe, Asia, Australasia, South America and the United States.

## THE IMPACT

### ENRICHING PUBLIC APPRECIATION AND IMAGINATION BY GENERATING NEW FORMS OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Public and industry recognition of *ILIAD*'s achievements demonstrate a key acknowledgement: that research-driven, innovative theatre and located public art practices - often confined to the realm of the theatrical fringe - can have significant critical and popular appeal when enacted within the context of national theatre. Both full marathon performances of the four-part work in its entirety - the first of which took place throughout the day of 26 September 2015, and the second over the night of 3 October 2015 - sold out. The production was enthusiastically reviewed, both in the Welsh and UK press, including a five-star review in *The Guardian*, which noted: '*ILIAD* is certainly the theatrical event of the year. It may be the theatrical event of the decade'.

The production was included amongst the body of Greek theatre adaptations collectively listed within *The Independent*'s 'Top 10 cultural events of the year'. Individual public comments and reactions to the work's full marathon performances, which included those of industry professionals who attended as audience members, attest to the impact on public appreciation.

The work has also had an important impact on the cultural life of Wales, and in particular the continued development of the nation's English language national theatre company, NTW. *ILIAD* both consolidated and greatly expanded the contributions of previous work by Dr Brookes and Professor Pearson to the company's goals, further demonstrating the potential and feasibility of context-specific work within NTW's portfolio, as a means to address diverse audiences with challenging, innovative and participatory forms of theatre.

### INFORMING PROGRAMMING AND GENERATING NEW WAYS OF THINKING THAT INFLUENCE PRODUCTION PRACTICES

The work brought together an exceptional range and level of expertise, within a team of outstanding and award-winning technical, creative and performance practitioners. The process also integrated an equally diverse range of young and emerging professionals, including technical and production assistants, recent creative graduates, as well as local teenage performers. The expert support and skills exchange amongst these professionals facilitated consistently high and uncompromised production values, as well as the realisation of innovative, complex and technically sophisticated media architectures and aesthetics. These collaborations and exchanges have informed subsequent practices and possibilities, not only for NTW, but for the individual collaborating professionals and emerging practitioners themselves.

One section of the cast, for example, continued to work together as a separate performance collective, attracting public funding and public commissions for their continued collaboration. Another member of the team involved with the sound work of the production (for whom *ILIAD* was the first major production experience) has subsequently gone on to work extensively with the multi-BAFTA award winning compositional studio John Hardy Music, as well as further collaborations with NTW.