

**Press Release: May 2021**

***Holding/Holding On***

Written by **Nicola McCartney**

Director **Claire Lamont**, Sound Designer **Pippa Murphy**, Filmmaker **Stuart Platt,** BSL Consultant/Dramaturg/Language **Rita McDade**

Cast: **Daniel Cahill**, **Neshla Caplan**, **Callum Cuthbertson**, **Karen Dunbar,** **Lucy Halliday**, **Finn den Hertog,** **Jamie Marie Leary**, **Sam Steel**, **Bea Webster.**

Community Collaborators: **Charlotte Armitage**, **Kenneth Joseph Murray** and **Murdoch Rodgers**

**A new filmed reading of a work in progress script exploring Scotland’s care system**

**Available to watch on the National Theatre of Scotland website from Wed 30 June, 7pm until Wed 21 July 2021 as part of *Care in Contemporary Scotland – A Creative Enquiry***

**Supported by the ScottishPower Foundation, The Rayne Foundation, the Hugh Fraser Foundation, the John Mather Trust and Scottish Children's Lottery Chance to Connect.**

Following a call-out process in 2020, National Theatre of Scotland commissioned two artists, Nicola McCartney and Lucy Gaizely/21Common to undertake a six-month project to investigate the impact that the arts can make within a care context across Scotland, the outcomes of which form *Care in Contemporary Scotland – A Creative Enquiry.* As part of the project **Nicola McCartney** engaged with care experienced adults and young people, community collaborators and sector professionals resulting in a filmed reading of a work in progress script, ***Holding/Holding On****,* which explores and gives voice to authentic narratives around Scotland’s care system. Lucy Gaizely/ 21 Common is working with learning-disabled adults to create a new experimental documentary: ***Non Optimum: When It's Safe To Do So*** addressing personal experiences of care and access to services during the pandemic.

Playwright and dramaturg Nicola McCartney’s creative enquiry into Scotland’s care system follows on from the Independent Care Review published in 2020 and at its centre, The Promise, a commitment to implement change demanded by the review to ensure that all children grow up ‘loved, safe and respected.’ As part of her creative process, Nicola, who brings many years of experience as a foster carer, met with young people and professionals from across the care system and listened to their stories. She gathered stories in online sessions with social workers, carers, Children’s Panel members, Independent Care Review contributors and care-experienced adults and young people exploring experiences of living and working in the care system. Nicola has been working with participants to help them take control of their narratives and through one-to-one collaboration helps to give voice to their authentic stories.

Working with Kenneth Murray (writer, consultant, campaigner) Charlotte Armitage (campaigner, blogger) and Murdoch Rodgers (producer, director, writer) Nicola has used these conversations as the basis for developing a new script and this work-in-progress filmed reading. At the core of this creative response are the stories from care experienced young people. In a series of thought-provoking scenes and interventions ***Holding/Holding On*** interrogates how society treats those in care, those who are care experienced and the experience of the carers. It highlights the language used to define them; society’s fascination with media tropes; the entanglement of care with class and poverty and most significantly, the role that care plays in the care system. ***Holding/Holding On*** challenges our perceptions and asks important questions about the future of Scotland’s care system.

**Nicola McCartney says***: “Since October 2020, it’s been my privilege to listen to the stories of care experienced people, social workers, foster carers and others who work within the care system. Actively and compassionately listening to people’s voices and experiences seems to be one of the things that’s really missing in the system right now. And I wanted to hold space for those who wanted to share with me. I’m really thankful to the people who did.*

*“From these one-to-one sessions I’ve tried to piece together a sense of not just how the Care system for children and young people works in Scotland, but how it feels to be part of it both as a young person, and as someone who looks after young people. ‘Holding/ Holding On’, gives different perspectives on how we look after our most vulnerable children and where we might go in future. The filmed reading of our work-in-progress puts forward ideas about what’s not working, celebrates some of what is and I hope asks some big questions about what each of us needs to do to really make Scotland ‘the best place in the world to grow up’”.*

**Behind the Themes | Holding / Holding On**

**Wed 30 June, 8.45pm (tbc)**

JoinNicola McCartney, Charlotte Armitage, Charlie McGonigle and Kenneth Joseph Murray directly after the first screening of *Holding / Holding On*, for a free online conversation about the making of the filmed reading and the themes behind it. This will be a panel discussion on Zoom webinar with the opportunity for audience Q&A and will be chaired by National Theatre of Scotland’s Artistic Director Jackie Wylie.

This event will be BSL interpreted by and live captioned.

**Dates and Times**

Streaming online at nationaltheatrescotland.com from 7pm Wed 30 Jun until Wed 21 Jul.

**Tickets**: Free from nationaltheatrescotland.com

**Access Information**

Fully Captioned and Audio Described. Portions of the piece are performed in BSL.

**Lucy Gaizely/ 21 Common**’s new experimental documentary ***Non Optimum: When It's Safe To Do*** willbe streaming online at nationaltheatrescotland.com from **Thu 1 July at 7pm until Thu 22 July**as part of *Care in Contemporary Scotland – A Creative Enquiry.*

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**ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES**

**Daniel Cahill** trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. His previous work with National Theatre of Scotland includes *James I, James II, James III and Truant.*Other theatre credits include *Small Worlds Dir Ron Bain* (Oran Mor), *Lost & His God* (Citizens Theatre), *Macbeth* (INtheatre), *Blackout*(Thick Skin UK Tour/Thick Skin Edinburgh Festivals). TV credits include *Pumped*(BBC), *Bruadar a Bhais* (BBC Alba), *Rocket Surgery* (BBC Scotland) and *River City* (BBC Scotland). Film credits include *Anna and the Apocalypse* (Blazing Griffon), *Blackout* (Oscar Films), *Pulse* (City Films) and *The Goodsouls* (Jumpcut Productions/Sigma Films).

**Neshla Caplan** **trained at the** Royal Conservatoire of Scotland: MA Musical Theatre. **Theatre credits include** *Move~Gluasad,* Disaster Plan; *The Alchemist,* Tron Theatre; *Arctic Oil, The Breakfast Plays;*The Traverse, *Sunshine on Leith;*Leeds Playhouse/UK No 1 Tour; *ADAM;*National Theatre of Scotland; *Toy Plastic Chicken, Wee Free: The Musical, Voices In Her Ear;*Play Pie and a Pint; *The Sunshine Ghost,* Festival Theatre; *Secret Show 1;*Blood Of The Young/Tron Theatre; *Shark in the Park,*Macrobert/Assembly Rooms; *The Choir,*The Citizens Theatre/ATG; *Arabian Nights, The BFG;*The Royal Lyceum Theatre, *Beauty and the Beast,*Glasgow Life. **Film/Radio/Voiceover Credits:** *Christmas Tales*; Royal Lyceum Theatre. *Scenes For Survival-Future Perfect Tense;*National Theatre of Scotland, *From Fact to Fiction: After Midnight;*BBC R4, *Transport Scotland;*Whitespace. *The Bard's Tale;*inXile Entertainment.

**Callum Cuthbertson’s** recent theatre credits include: ***Glasgow Girls*** (NTS/Stratford East); ***Gary Tank Commander Live*** (Mick Perrin); ***Pie Man*** (Rose Theatre); ***Cardinal Sinne*** (Glasgay/Glasgow Tron); ***Ane Pleasant Satyre Of The Thrie Estaitis*** (AandBC Theatre); ***Aladdin*** and ***Babes In The Wood*** (both MJ Cox Productions); ***The Tobacco Merchant's Lawyer*** (London Finborough); ***Number One Fan***; ***Eulogy***; ***Driving Manuel****;* ***Top Table****;* ***Bunnies****;* ***Raspberry****;* ***The Shoemaker’s Wonderful Wife****;* ***Rain****;* ***Cinders***;and ***Quartet*** (all for Glasgow Oran Mor); ***Mother Courage***; ***The Graduate*** and ***Dumbstruck*** (all Dundee Rep); ***Mammy’s Boys*** (Prince & Princess of Wales Trust); ***Futurology*** (Suspect Culture/National Theatre of Scotland); and ***Mary Stuart*** and ***Home: Dumfries*** (both National Theatre of Scotland).  Film & television includes: the regular role of Gary's Dad Martin McLintoch in ***Gary: Tank Commander*** (Series I, II & III); ***Logan High*** (Chalkboard TV); ***Scot Squad***; ***Rab C Nesbitt***; ***Empty***; and ***Legit*** (all for Comedy Unit/BBC); ***What We Did on Our Holiday*** (Origin Pictures); ***Not Another Happy Ending*** (Synchronicity Films); ***How Not To Live Your Life*** (BBC); ***Dear Green Place***; and ***Still Game*** (both for Effin Gee/BBC); ***Jess The Border Collie*** (BBC); ***The End of the Sentence***(Tartan Short/BBC);***Intergalactic Kitchen*** (BBC); ***Grockle Dance***; ***Rockface*** (Union Pictures/BBC); ***How High The Castle Walls*** (Fallingwater Films); and the feature films Not Another Happy Ending (Synchronicity Films) and ***Breaking The Waves*** (Zentropa Films).

**Karen Dunbar** is one of Scotland’s best-known comedy actors. She attended The Comedy Unit’s open auditions in 1997. The company immediately put her to work on their sketch show Chewin’ the Fat. She then went on to star in her own show, The Karen Dunbar Show, which received two coveted Golden Rose nominations for Best Comedy Show and Karen herself two personal nominations for Best Comedy Performance. Theatre work includes #71 (Oran Mor/Traverse Theatre), Shakespeare Trilogy (Donmar Warehouse), Witsherface: Funny How…? (Glasgow International Comedy Festival), Priscilla Queen of the Desert The Musical (David Ian Productions Ltd/Edinburgh Playhouse), Henry IV (Donmar Warehouse/St Ann’s Warehouse, New York), Cyrano De Bergerac (Edinburgh Book Festival/Communicado Theatre Co), Can’t Forget About You (Lyric Theatre, Belfast/Tron Theatre), Happy Days (Tron Theatre), The Guid Sisters (National Theatre of Scotland), Men Should Weep (National Theatre), Stand Up Drunk, A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle and Ha, Ha, Ha (Oran Mor) and The Vagina Monologues (Mark Goucher Productions). Television work includes River City and An Audience With Burns (BBC Scotland), 2014 Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony (Jack Morton Worldwide for BBC), MI High: Prison Break (Brown Eyed Boy), Happy Hollidays (Effingee Productions), Chewin’ the Fat and The Karen Dunbar Show (BBC Comedy Unit). Documentary projects include I Belong to Glasgow (Hopscotch Films for BBC) and When Karen Dunbar Met Denise Mina (Artworks Scotland for BBC Scotland). Film projects include Mary Queen of Scots (Focus Features/Working Title) and Rice Paper Stars (Tartan Shorts).

**Lucy Halliday** has worked extensively with PACE Youth Theatre where she is a member, and also recently becoming a Trainee Drama Tutor. Lucy has been a regular performer with PACE Theatre Company, including the annual panto. Along with these projects recent roles include; co-host of *Big Night In* with Darren Brownlie (dir. Jordan Blackwood); *Crusaders* (National Theatre Connections 2020, dir. Jenni Mason); *Sma Shot*(Radio Play) and *Safe Choices* (TIE touring schools production. Lucy has also worked in various roles to increase youth engagement within the arts - as the youngest member on a Creative Scotland Funding Panel and as part of Youthlink Scotland/YTAS *“message to young people”* campaign. *Holding/Holding On* is her first time working with National Theatre of Scotland and Nicola McCartney.

**Finn den Hertog**works as a director, writer and actor across stage, screen and radio. He trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland graduating in 2007. Recent directing credits include the award-winning The Afflicted (groupwork) and Square Go(Francesca Moody Productions) which played two sell out runs at the Edinburgh Fringe 2018/19 and a run off-Broadway in spring of this year. Other directing work includes: Anatomy of A Suicide (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland); Escaped Alone (Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh/Luminate Festival) Signs Preceding The End of The World (Lyceum/Edinburgh Book Festival)TBCTV (A collaboration with designer Chloe Lamford at Somerset House Studios); Men In Blue, Ten New Messages(Young Vic); Light Boxes (Grid Iron); Squash (Oran Mor/Traverse). He has worked as associate and assistant director on productions at the Young Vic, National Theatre, St Ann’s Warehouse and in London’s West End. He is a regular visiting director for the University of Edinburgh’s MSc Playwriting course and has worked as a workshop leader and facilitator for a number of theatres including the Royal Court, Old Vic and Donmar Warehouse. Finn is co-director of [groupwork](https://www.groupworktheatre.com/), a Scottish based company specialising in highly physical cross-discipline theatre. They were recently named in The List Magazine’s 2019 Hot 100.

**Jamie Marie Leary** is a Barbadian/Scottish actress who Trained at Langside College. Alongside a growing list of TV credits, since graduating in 2014, Jamie has worked regularly in Scottish theatre. Jamie is currently Staring in River City as ‘Rebecca Fleming’. Theatre credits include: *Expensive Sh\*t* (**Soho Theatre/ Traverse Theatre**) *'F\*cked.Com'* (**Merchant Culture**), *'Class Act:Silver'* (**Traverse Theatre**), *'Locker Room Talk'* (**Traverse Theatre /Latitude festival**), *'Stand By'* (**Utter theatre/The Byre**) *'Breakfast Plays: B!RTH'* (**Traverse Theatre**) *549: Scots of the Spanish Civil War* (**Wonderfools)** *Cinderella* (**Citizens Theatre**) *A Christmas Carol* (**Citizens Theatre**)

TV Credits include: *River City* (**BBC)** *The Nest* (**BBC**) *Traces* (**Alibi/BBC**) *Casualty* (**BBC**) Film Credits: *Shepherd* (**GC Films**), *Super November* (**14c Studios**), *Where Do We Go From Here* (**Worrying Drake**).

**Nicola McCartney** is a playwright, director and dramaturg. She trained as a director with Citizen Theatre/ G&J Productions and Charabanc Theatre Company Belfast. Nicola was Artistic Director of lookout Theatre Company, Glasgow from 1992-2002, and has twice been an Associate Playwright of Playwrights Studio Scotland. She has worked for a host of organisations as a dramaturg including Vanishing Point and Stellar Quines/ Edinburgh International Festival. Her plays include: *Easy, Heritage*, *Home*, *Standing Wave*: *Delia Derbyshire In The 60s*, *Rachel’s House*, *Cave Dwellers* and *Lifeboat*. She co-authored *How Not To Drown* with Dritan Kastrati (Thick Skin/ Tron/Traverse) which won a Fringe First at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2019. She is also a social theatre practitioner and has worked with all sorts of groups including people within the criminal justice system in UK and USA, asylum seekers and refugees, drug users, survivors of domestic violence and childhood abuse. Nicola has worked with Traverse’s flagship outreach programme, Class Act, since 1997, taking it to Russia, Ukraine and India. In 2018 she was a recipient of a Writers’ Guild of Great Britain Olwen Wymark award for encouraging theatre in the UK. Nicola is currently Reader in Writing for Performance at University of Edinburgh where she leads the Masters programme in Playwriting

**Kenneth Joseph Murray** is a writer and public affairs specialist who was born in Glasgow. Kenneth grew up in a single parent household in the East End of Glasgow. During this time he experienced poverty, domestic abuse & homelessness. Kenneth later experienced several years of being in the care system.  He currently writes a column for Holyrood Magazine and has written for *The Spectator*, *STV* and *The Daily Record*. Kenneth is an award winning campaigner on the media portrayal of Care Experienced people and provided a sensitivity read of the book, *The Beaker Girls* and consulted on the TV series, *My Mum Tracy Beaker*. Kenneth also wrote a short video for BBC The Social on representation of Care Experienced people. He is currently working on a number of screenwriting projects. Kenneth won the Sheila McKechnie Campaigners Award in 2019 for his work on media portrayal of Care Experienced people.

**Murdoch Rodgers** is 70 and is a retired television producer and journalist and former Panel Member. He was born in the Gorbals before he moved in the mid-1950s to a new council house (with a bathroom) on the outskirts of the city - Barmulloch. He was the first member of his family to go to university. During his career in television, he worked for the BBC on a string of award-winning films (BAFTA, Royal Television Society, Foreign Press Association, British Journalism Awards) including investigations into the care industry and historical child abuse. He believes he was fortunate to have worked with some great people who shared his passion for using the medium to expose injustice and the conceit of the powerful.He has contributed to this project because the one thing that separated him from his childhood peers, with whom he shared so much, was the love and support of his family. A gift he has carried with him throughout his life.

**Sam Steel** loved working with National Theatre of Scotland and Nicola McCartney on *Holding/Holding On*. She has previously worked with National Theatre of Scotland and Nicola. She had a part in the *Scenes for Survival* play ‘*Future Perfect, Tense’* performing and filming at home during lockdown with her mum Neshla. Along with these great projects, Sam was part of the ‘21 Common’ young company for their performance of *‘In the interest of...’* performed at Tramway as part of the Take me Somewhere festival in 2019.

**Bea Webster** is a deaf queer Scottish-Thai actor, writer and theatre-maker who graduated with a BA Performance in British Sign Language and English from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. She was a member of Solar Bear’s Deaf Youth Theatre. Bea wrote, performed and directed *House of Ladies* for RCS's On The Verge festival at the Citizens Theatre. She co-wrote and devised *Everything Will Be Perfect*, playing as a drag queen alongside Jamie Rea as Vikki Ryan at Buzzcut: Double Thrills. She has published a poem in both BSL and English titled *Long Lost Lover*, about her birthplace of Thailand. She also wrote and performed in BBC Social's *How not to be d\*cks to deaf people*. Her recent acting work since graduating includes *The Winter’s Tale* (Royal Shakespeare Company) *Peeling* (Taking Flight Theatre Company), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Red Ladder Theatre Company). Bea is one of the Playwrights Studio Scotland’s mentored playwrights for 2020. She was nominated Best Actress in a Play at The Stage Debut Awards 2019 for her role of Kattrin in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Bea communicates in both English and British Sign Language.