

**Press Release May 2021**

***Non Optimum: When It's Safe To Do So***

Created by **Lucy Gaizely/21Common**

Creative team: **Lucy Gaizely**, **Gary Gardiner**, **Ian Johnston**. Artist Facilitator: **Craig McCorquodale**

Sound Composition and vocal coach **Jennifer Hart,** Sound composition **Joel McDiarmid,** Technical Artist **Daniel Brown**, Facilitator for the Q&A **Jonathan Reid**

Cast: **Ian Johnston**, **Allan McEwan**, **Gavin Mitchell,** **Jaqui Smyth**, **Peter Sproul**

**A new experimental documentary exploring Scotland’s care system**

**Available to watch on the National Theatre of Scotland website from Thu 1 July, 7pm until Thu 22 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, Lucy Gaizely/21Common and Nicola McCartney 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 Lucy Gaizely/ 21 Common has been 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. 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.

In 2020, **21Common**, led by artist **Lucy Gaizely** together with Scotland’s leading learning-disabled artist **Ian Johnston,** created an alternative virtual club night for learning-disabled adults on Zoom called Non Optimum. This weekly club provided a virtual space to socialise, dance and reconnect with others in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period vital care services that learning-disabled individuals across the country depend on were suddenly stopped and so the club community became an important source of support for attenders.

***Non Optimum: When It's Safe To Do So*** is a short film, documenting those months in lockdown, following the lives of Allan, Jackie, Ian and Peter who met at the club. It takes us on an unpredictable, uncontrolled journey through lockdown celebrating and responding to the group of rockers and ravers who found each other during a global pandemic. The club-goers initially bonded over a shared admiration for Scottish actor Gavin Mitchell. Keen to be involved in the project, Gavin provides narration for the film and his inner monologue becomes part of our fragmented journey through the city. The film disrupts the construct of normality and extracts moments of the mundane and the surreal, centring on endless Zooming, raving, domestic dreaming and the reimagined, forbidden outdoors.

Produced using homemade filmed footage and film shot on location this experimental documentary addresses uncomfortable issues around visibility, ability, ableism and otherness. Engaging, disturbing and funny ***Non Optimum: When It's Safe To Do So*** takes us on a lockdown journey that is not our own.

**Lucy Gaizely says:** “*Non-Optimum: When it's safe to do so has been the most fun I have ever had in the name of research. An ever-evolving project changed by time, restrictions, and those we found or who found us along the way. Without design a motley crew has assembled over the last 8 months, a group of people with far more in common than differences, a group that has loved and laughed its way through Fridays, despite and inspite of everything else.*

*“We have danced, talked, learned everything there is to know about the history of music probably starting in the 80s; practically booked a holiday to Millport; learned intricate details about Gavin Mitchell's CV from someone who knows him better than he knows himself and have seen more hats and hospital scrubs than we thought possible. In exploring the context of Care in Scotland, I have now also found some of the best artists and collaborators in the world!”*

**Behind the Themes | Non Optimum: When It’s Safe To Do So**

**Thursday 1 July, 8pm tbc**

Join Lucy Gaizely, Gary Gardiner, Ian Johnston, Jaqui Smyth, Alan McEwan and Peter Sproul directly after the first screening of *Non Optimum* for a free online conversation about the making of the film and the themes behind it. This will be a panel discussion on Zoom webinar with the opportunity for audience Q&A.

This event will be BSL interpreted by and live captioned.

**Dates and Times**

Streaming online at nationaltheatrescotland.com from 1 July 7.00pm until 22 July.

**Tickets:** Free from nationaltheatrescotland.com

**Access Information**

Audio Described, Captioned and BSL Interpreted

**Nicola McCartney**’s filmed reading of a new work in progress script, ***Holding/Holding On***, will stream online at nationaltheatrescotland.com from **Wed 30 June, 7pm until Wed 21 July 2021** as part of *Care in Contemporary Scotland – A Creative Enquiry.*

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**ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES**

**Lucy Gaizely/21Common** create performance that challenges the accepted and expected, led by artists Lucy Gaizely and Gary Gardiner, Scotland’s leading learning-disabled artist Ian Johnston and Executive Producer Louise Irwin. In 2018 we were pleased to be awarded RFO status by Creative Scotland. Our international hit show *Dancer*, an Unlimited Commission 2014, was developed during a residency at Sense Scotland. Since then *Dancer* has toured – and is still touring – the world, being programmed across the UK, was part of Made in Scotland at the Edinburgh Fringe 2016, toured to South America, Scandinavia and was part of the Made in Scotland Festival in Brussels in 2019. In 2016, building on learning from *Dancer*, we began a similar process to make a new piece of work. T*he Ballad of the Apathetic Son and His Narcissistic Mother* was developed over two years with a 16-year-old boy and his real-life Mum. This was also part of Made in Scotland Showcase at the Edinburgh Fringe 2018 and went on to undertake a significant international tour to Germany, Poland, Sweden, London, Australia and New Zealand. Our most recent work *IN THE INTEREST OF HEALTH AND SAFETY CAN PATRONS PLEASE SUPERVISE THEIR CHILDREN AT ALL TIMES*….featured ten ten-year-old children, high scaffolding, French torch songs and some very scabby mattresses. A deranged disco of a show, it examined society’s reluctance to let children take risks. It was premiered as part of Tramway Presents and Take Me Somewhere Festival 2019 after being developed through Imaginate’s PuSH EU Lab residency since 2017. It received widespread attention, receiving both a five star and a two-star review, with the latter absolutely disgusted by the work. It was also nominated as Outstanding Dance Performance at the Herald Culture Awards 2019 and was selected as part of the Made in Scotland Showcase 2020, now postponed to 2021. Other work includes a commission by National Theatre of Scotland to co-curate a large-scale festival of work for young adults called *Futureproof*, which placed ten international artists working in social practice in ten locations across Scotland

**Gavin Mitchell**’s theatre work includes: *Still Game, Still Game – The Final Farewell* (Phil McIntyre); *Casablanca The Gin Joint Cut*(Oran Mor and Gilded Balloon); *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*(David Ian/ATG); *Aladdin*(FFE/King’s Theatre); *Canibal Women of Mars*(Tron Theatre); *Cinderalla*(First Family Entertainment). Television work includes: *The Last Czars*(Netflix); *Still Game*(BBC/BBC Scotland); *MI High*(Kudos/BBC); *Rab C Nesbitt*(The Comedy Unit); *Field of Blood*(Slate Films North); *Happy Hollidays*(Effingee Productions); *Taggart 97/Grass*(SMG). Film work includes: *Outlaw King*(Sigma Films/Netflix); *Sawney – Flesh of Man*(Philabeg Films Ltd); *Songs For Amy*(Seafaring Films Ltd); *You Instead*(Sigma Films); *Being Human*(Warner Bros).

**Ian Johnston** is a long-term member of the collective 21common. He is the first learning disabled individual to be recipient of RFO from Creative Scotland. Amongst his work in the collective Ian has toured his hit show Dancer all over the world as well as presenting it as part of The Made in Scotland showcase both in Edinburgh and Brussels. Ian has an ongoing work in development called Dance Agitator which seeks to dismantle the ideas we have around dance, audiences and behaviour. This will culminate in a film in 2022.

**Allan McEwan** is 33 he has CLS (Coffin Lowry Syndrome) which is a very rare condition. He is always happy and sociable and never complains no matter what. Before Covid Allan went to Sense Scotland 5 days a week and had a personal assistant who took him to the pub, to the cinema and to karaoke nights. Because of the pandemic, Sense Scotland closed and have never offered him a place since reopening due to social distancing and very reduced numbers. His PA has been shielding and is still not back either. He has spent more than 15 months with his family and despite the challenges has been very happy, as always. His iPad has been his only connection with his friends, which was great when they finally got in touch with each other. He discovered Mrs Brown’s Boys and Still Game during lockdown, which is just his sense of humour. Allan loves going on cruises, as well as going to Florida and going to Millport, where he is known by just about everyone.

**Jaqui Smyth** has always loved music from a very early age, dancing around the living room at about 13 months old. Her love of music grew with the need to find out about all her favourite artists. At the age of three, she became interested in computers and was hooked; adored first-person shooters, and watching and learning anything new. At the age of eight years we were on holiday in America when Jaqui decided to jump into the deep end and swam under the water coming up at the other end, got out the pool and did the same again. That was the first day we knew she could swim!!!! Nobody had told her she couldn’t.. She’s in love with being outdoors, and thanks to Free Wheel North, is able to go on a bike if someone else pedals. Parks are another favourite and picnics are a big hit. Jaqui loves life, people, parties, Drama, and Art. She has sold many paintings at Project Ability and attends the Sensatronic Lab at Touchbase. Concerts are a great love and she has attended TRNSMT since it started in Glasgow. She’s a regular at the SSE hydro, watching all her favourite bands perform. Jaqui is enamored by the Abbie Resource Base Support Service, where she currently goes 5 days a week and has a lot of friends there.

**Peter Sproul** is 26 and enjoys being in bands called The Touch Beats and Sensatronic Lab. Since lockdown, he has not been able to see any of his friends. But since joining the National Theatre of Scotland he has enjoyed being part of the Friday zoom meetings - dancing and chatting and filming at his house.