

*Who Do We Think We Are? Representing the Human* postgraduate symposium at the Centre for Creative Collaboration, Kings Cross, London. 19 March 2011.

## A Performance

### **Titillation**

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY EMILY UNDERWOOD-LEE, CHOREOGRAPHED BY KYLIE ANN SMITH



**Titillation** is my attempt to celebrate the breastless, post-surgical, sexually desirable and desirous, confrontational, cancerous body. I am attempting to foreground my marked, scarred and scary body through a striptease where everything comes off - even my breasts. **Titillation** is comprised of a series of revelations: I reveal who I think I am, I reveal who I think I was, I reveal who I thought I would be, I reveal my own desire, I reveal my body and I reveal my scars. I never reveal my real eyelashes; the false ones are much better.

When I started the process of making this performance I wanted to look at the wider issues surrounding the body as a site of illness, not the life and death trials but the little things about cancer that make living with the marks of the disease a new,

different, fascinating and challenging experience. In **Titillation** I attempt to talk about my experiences of cancer while trying to be both funny and sexy.

**Titillation** follows on from my earlier show, **Patience**, which drew on a series of letters written to the child who was still in my belly when I received my cancer diagnosis.

Below are three extracts from the first performance in the **Titillation** series. The series contains a second show, **Titillation Grade 3**, developed in collaboration with Kylie Ann Smith and Sean Tuan John. **Titillation Grade 3** continues to explore the themes of desire and the cancer-marked body. I imagine it won't stop here; there may be many more titillations.

Emily Underwood-Lee, 2011

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### *Verse 1*

*The stage is set with red slash curtains, microphone and chair. Centre stage is a pair of sparkling shoes. The room should be dimly lit. It feels sleazy, I am afraid and excited, keen to meet the people in the room, ready to look into their eyes, ready to notice the shape of their lips, my heart beats fast and I open the door*

Hello. Good evening. I'm so glad you are all here. I'm Emily, and I'm here to take care of all your needs. I can soothe, salve, stitch and dress. I can prod, poke and rub and I always...

*Pause, blow on fingers*

...warm my hands. Most of all though I'm here to talk about breasts,

*Grasp my chest, great excitement*

boobs, tits, fun bags, mammary glands, chesticles, lady pillows, melons, flesh bombs, jubblics, Bristols, norks, hooters, jugs, bazookas, baps, bangers and bosoms.

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### *Verse 4*

While I'm here I'd also like to talk a bit about Patrick Swayze. Most noted for his portrayal of Johnny Castle in *Dirty Dancing* (that's the one I love best) but he felt he gave his best work in his last project, the TV detective show *The Beast*. Anyone else a fan of Patrick?

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*I'm with you, you and I both understand*

It was Patrick who taught me the power of large masculine hands.

*Hands in air, onto waist, breathe in deeply to suck in tummy and then breathe out slowly over microphone.*

*16 seconds of music, begin THE DANCE*

Three years ago I heard that Patrick was ill, pancreatic cancer. Incurable. I started to dream that we would dance the last dance from Dirty Dancing and we would do the lift! And it would be fabulous.

*I raise up my own body, it is only me but he is there too, I am him and I am me, we are one battered, post-cancerous body, reaching and holding, supporting and flying*

*Drop, walk to microphone, find someone, you are all Patrick now*

I'll make you a promise, this is my dance space and I'm going to dance for you later.

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### **Verse 6**

*Open eyes. Look directly at you. You know what's coming next. I'm not going to let you go.*

*I lick my finger, I move my hand down my throat, I touch my chest, I move my hand between my thighs and spread my legs*

You are on your knees crawling towards me, enticing me, drawing me in to your body, your sweat, your strong hands, your hard chest, your open mouth.

*I stand over you, tower above you*

I will lick your wounds. I will kiss away your tears. I will drink your sweat. I will caress you until the pain is gone.

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### **Verse 7**

*The heartbeat returns, I move back to the stage, I break the moment.*

*Put microphone down. Sit on chair, shoes off. Informal, casual. A rest.*

I watched you dance again and I knew new things.

I watched you dance again and I knew it would all end in death. That perfect body would become frail and broken. That face would thin and crumble. Those cheeks would hollow. That belly would bloat. That chest would ooze fat and puss, stinking as it dripped into a bucket.

I watched you dance again and I knew I couldn't stop it.

I watched you dance again and I was scared. I was scared of everything. I was scared of what I saw, I was scared of what I did, of who I am, and most of all I was scared of walking out of this room and never feeling the rest of my whole life the way I feel when I'm with you.

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***Verse 8***

*Stand up. Big smile. I am excited again.*

*I'm going to do some dancing now.*

*Take off hospital GOWN to reveal hospital gown, corset*

*Turn around to show the gown falling open, red net petticoats, red fishnets, 'frou frou' knickers*

*Music starts as hospital GOWN falls to ground*

*THE DANCE, I remove the shoulders of my gown, my red silk bra, my breasts, I twirl, ridiculous and fantastic, repulsive and tempting, tassels fly, jelly breasts wrinkle, scars are revealed, glitter, glitter, glitter. I'm going to show, who is going to look?*