

# Helen Tennison

director | writer | theatre-maker

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*'Director Helen Tennison excels at combining text and movement, and the show's beauty lies in how the movement mirrors, contrasts and accentuates the emotional struggles of its characters.'*

*- Stav Meishar, Circus Diaries, Everything I See I Swallow (Edinburgh Fringe First Winner)*

## About me

I'm an Edinburgh Fringe First Award winning director working across new writing, classics, site-responsive performance, devising, community work, education and new media.

I began my career performing in physical theatre; these roots are evident in my visual approach to storytelling and desire to push at the boundaries of form. This approach compliments my naturalistic directors training and my specialist area of Shakespeare & Verse Speaking. Whilst my main focus is directing, I am also a commissioned playwright and create cross disciplinary work as a performer. I have worked in many countries and enjoy international creative partnerships.

I'm committed to promoting diversity and wellbeing within theatre. I love to make theatre that is rooted in place and people.

You can read a recent profile on me in **The Stage** here:

<https://www.thestage.co.uk/qa/helen-tennison-director-and-writer-bang-average-theatre>

You can view **short videos of my directing** work here:

<https://htennison.wixsite.com/helentennison/video-gallery>

## Current Projects

**Navigating Margaret, Director/Writer** a fairytale about living with Dementia created for a mixed community & professional cast based on stories from local Dementia cafes. Produced by **Arts Uplift**, performances Malvern March '23

**Forgive Me, Director/Devisor** Live & interactive digital performance about autism and gaming, featuring 'Jacob Rees- Mogg' doing a pole dance. Previewing at **The Lowry**, July '23

**A Midsummer Night's Dream, Director** Actor/Musician production for **Vienna's English Theatre** May/June/July '23

**Much Ado About Nothing, Director** Set against the backdrop of 80's Britain, site-responsive performances at South Oxford Adventure Playground & The Maltings Roman Theatre, St Albans, Produced by **Creation Theatre** July, August '23

**Dirty Corset, Director** award winning Restoration mash-up. **Bang Average Theatre**, North of England Tour Summer '23  
\*\*\*\* *sheer silliness and gross-out humour* The Stage

**Academic Writing Spaces Between: The Actor's Body in Shakespeare's Scenes of Sex and Procreation** for publication by **Arden, Bloomsbury**. The focus is on embodied performance and my process of inclusivity and diversity in staging Shakespeare.

*'Tennison breathes fresh air into this classy piece of chick-lit'* - *Honour Bayes, Time Out, Sense and Sensibility*

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## Directing | selected credits

Shirley Valentine	Teatret ved Sorte Hest, Copenhagen 2022 Copenhagen Culture Award Winner
Dirty Corset <i>Devised</i>	The Pleasance, London 2022, Juries Choice Award Bergen & Stockholm Festivals 2021
Hecuba <i>Direction/Adaptation</i>	Speilraum 2022 Vienna, Austria.
Katie's Hysteria <i>Director/Writer</i>	British Youth Music Theatre 2021 Site- specific teen musical
Everything I See I Swallow <i>Devised</i>	Edinburgh Fringe First Winner 2019 Aerial rope, Bondage and intergenerational feminism
TEACH <i>Director/Dramaturg</i>	New Writing by Matthew Roberts Edinburgh Festival 2019
Dracula	Creation Theatre Site-responsive The London Library March 2019 Blackwell's Bookshop, Oxford March 2018
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Bermuda Festival January 2019 Midsummer Scene Festival, Dubrovnik, June 2017 & 2018
Black Maria	New Writing by Kate Kerrow, reading for Women at RADA 2018
Alice	Creation Theatre Big Tent 2017 Pop-up theatre in Bicester Village Spring/Summer 2017 Christmas Show 2015-16 & Site-Specific Summer 2015
Twelfth Night	Bermuda Festival 2017, Vienna's English Theatre 2016 Honey-Tongued Theatre Midsummer Scene Festival 2015
Cinderella and the Glass Slipper	Creation Theatre, The Mill Banbury 2016-17
Hamlet <i>First female Hamlet in the Balkan region</i>	Fort Lovrjenac, Dubrovnik, Midsummer Scene Festival 2016
The Arrest of Rosa Gold	By Diane Samuels, Rehearsed Reading with Penny Downie 2014
Wuthering Heights <i>Directed, Adapted &amp; Co-Produced</i>	Tour in association with Rosemary Branch Theatre and Guildford's Yvonne Arnaud 2014
World Enough and Time	New writing by Sarah Sigal, Dalston Bunker 2013
Sense and Sensibility <i>Directed and Co-Produced</i>	Offie Nominated Tour in association with Rosemary Branch Theatre and Guildford's Yvonne Arnaud 2013
Push me! Pull You! <i>Dramaturg</i>	Oxford Playhouse Circus Apocolypto 2013
Fay Weldon's Breakfast with Emma <i>Directed and Co-Produced</i>	Offie Nominated Tour In association with Rosemary Branch Theatre 2012
Antony and Cleopatra	Creation Theatre, Said Business Centre 2011
Something Strange	Grimeborn New Opera Festival, Arcola Theatre 2010
Breathing Corpses	Hen and Chickens Theatre 2009
Merry Wives of Windsor & The Winter's Tale <i>Verse Speaking Assistant to Giles Block</i>	Shakespeare's Globe 2008

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*'A masterpiece...sensuous, unsettling and absorbing to the point of hypnotic... a towering achievement.'*

*-Katherine MacAlister, The Oxford Times, Dracula.*

## Artistic Posts

### Associate Artist, Bathway Theatre part of Greenwich University 2021-22

Developing my creative psychogeography practice with the aim of building community and a sustainability in Woolwich and developing partnerships with academic researchers.

### Artistic Director, Two Year Acting Course Drama Studio London 2015-2017

Responsible for overall content and running of courses. Managing Heads of Departments, visiting directors and freelance tutors. Responsible for student pastoral care, overseeing auditions, running staff meetings, delivery of core acting modules, directing performance blocks, industry liaison.

Built links with **Kali Theatre** to create a free summer school for students of South Asian descent, developed **international auditions**, curated the **folio-on-phone** project celebrating 400 years of Shakespeare, introduced staff diversity training, playwrights of the global majority, Viewpoints, Hagen and self-taping to the curriculum. Created evening courses.

### Artist in Residence University of South Florida projects 2013 -2022

Produced by Matthew Gale (producer of Hairspray and Priscilla), the annual two-month residency places a British theatre artist in the University of South Florida. Theatrical research, nurturing young artists and creating new work. Productions include: **Titus Andronicus**, **The Crucible**, **Orlando**, an interactive digital production **Magnetic North**, **Ravens**, a devised multi-media piece about women and race in American History and **Structures and the Individual** devised piece about mental health, geographical space and social anxiety post-pandemic.

### Associate Director, Rosemary Branch Theatre 2009-2014

Nurturing emerging artists, directing and co-producing three **Off West End Award Nominated** tours in association with Guildford's **Yvonne Arnaud: Breakfast with Emma, Sense and Sensibility, Wuthering Heights**.

### Community Theatre Associate, Belgrade Theatre 2003-2008

Direction: **Big School TIE Tour, Dead Beautiful Youth Theatre Tour**. Movement Direction: **Hussain and Harry** with **Coventry Youth Refugees** Assistant Direction: **The Mysteries** co-production with **Galway International Arts Festival**, professional and community casts, includes working with **The Shysters Theatre Company** for learning disabled actors.

Managing summer youth projects, teaching voice and dance on the **Acting Out** programme for young people at risk.



## Additional Experience

*\*\*\*\* 'Funny, inventive, intense and thought-provoking...an important piece of theatre'*

*- Lela Tredwell, Review Hub, Brighton Fringe '22, Doggerland*

**Doggerland** Creator/performer, cross-disciplinary performance for a small audience, supported by **Het Zuidijlk Toneel, Netherlands** and **Arts Council England**. Scandinavian tour '22. **Best Show of the Festival Nomination STOFF**, Stockholm.

**New Writing development, dramaturgy & direction** including **Lovesick** by Georgina Barley (**White Bear** and **Cockpit Theatre**) and **BOOTS** by Jessica Butcher.

**Movement direction & choreography** includes ensemble work for **Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry**, Drama school productions, **Legoland** costume performers & **Tivili Gardens Christmas Show, Denmark**.

### Dramaturgy and direction for new musical development

Experience working as an actor, dancer, street performer and in comedy improv.

Currently experimenting with psychogeography in performance.

*Stylish and Poetic Work – Total Theatre, Icebound*

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*'Utterly watchable, well-written, informative and emotional. That it is about living with Dementia feels like a bonus.'*  
- Audience member and carer, *Navigating Margaret*

## Writing

**Navigating Margaret**, a large cast community play about living with Dementia rooted in Worcester local history 2023

**Hecuba and her Women**, adapted from Euripides plays Hecuba and Trojan Women, Speilraum, Vienna 2022

**Magnetic North** interactive digital performance about oil, environment and exploration in the Arctic 2021

**Orlando**, adaptation of the novel for stage, performed University of South Florida 2020

**Wuthering Heights**, adapted for a cast of 6, Yvonne Arnaud main stage and regional tour 2014

## Education & Community Work

### Ongoing Workshops

Teaching at European festivals, Drama Schools, Universities (University of Birmingham, Goldsmiths), The Actors Centre and independently on the following topics:

Shakespeare, Movement for Actors, Big Emotions, Directing, Theatre-Making, Restoration Theatre, Multi-lingual Theatre, Nurturing Your Creativity, 9 Viewpoints.

### Drama School and University Direction at the following institutions:

East 15, Drama Studio London, Royal Academy of Music, Vienna's English Theatre Academy, University of Birmingham.

### Further education experience:

Artistic Director, Two Year Acting Course, Drama Studio London 2015-17

Head of Movement CCT BA Hons Acting accredited by University of West London 2008-13

Old Vic Theatre Education Associate 2004-07

Community Theatre Associate, Belgrade Theatre 2003-2008

Drama summer schools for adults with severe learning and physical disabilities Croxley Project

Drama for Youth Crime Prevention, Brent.

Facilitating Shakespeare in Prisons.

Theatre for Confidence and Mental Health for people who are long term unemployed.

Drama for Health Mantamaru Aboriginal Community, Western Australia

Curriculum Design HNVQ Performing Arts Course South Thames College

## My Training

### Recent research & short courses:

Arts for Health and Social Change, Intercultural Roots, Conference (London) and Ecological Research (Yorkshire) 2022

Laban Choreology, Trinity Laban, London 2021

Bartenieff Fundamentals Online Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies, New York 2020

Viewpoints, Suzuki & Theatre-Making, Training Ensemble Netherlands, various courses, Belgium & Holland, 2015-19

**Further workshops & short courses:** Introduction to Intimacy Coordination for Directors, Philippe Gaullier (Bouffon), Shared Experience, The Place (Contemporary Dance and Movement Practices), Islington Arts Factory (African Contemporary Dance) John Wright, Guy Dartnell, Complicite, BASSC Stage Combat. Mask work with Trestle, LISPA puppetry and object manipulation, Clowning with Peta Lily.

### Initial Training

Directors training with Katie Mitchell and Paul Hunter via Living Pictures

LAMDA Hons. Voice and Speech Teacher Training

Desmond Jones School of Mime and Physical Theatre.

Actors Institute Post-Graduate Actor Training

Redroofs Diploma in Musical Theatre

*'Helen Tennison rips up the book and darts between the stories with fierce energy.'*

- Libby Purves, *The Times*, *Tales from King James*.