



BLAST THEORY

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In a murky world of undercover surveillance what will you do when the power is in your hands? Challenging immersive theatre piece exploring the ethics of covert state intrusion to premiere at the 50th Brighton Festival



A provocative immersive theatre experience that invites audiences to go undercover at a gig and consider the ethics of state-sanctioned covert surveillance will premiere at the 50th Brighton Festival this May [7-29 May, 2016].

Operation Black Antler is a co-creation from multi award-winning interactive art pioneers **Blast Theory** and celebrated site-specific theatre company **Hydrocracker**, created in response to revelations about the treatment of peaceful protestors at the hands of the Metropolitan Police.

The piece, and a **parallel public debate on 23 May: *Complicity and the ethics of undercover surveillance***, Chaired by **Guardian Journalist and Chair of Brighton Festival, Polly Toynbee**, set out to look at the moral corruption that develops with the use of undercover officers as well as the wider ethical questions of when surveillance is justified.

Like many previous works from its creators, *Operation Black Antler* asks important politically motivated questions about the role of the individual in society. By inviting participants to pretend to be a police officer who is pretending to be a protestor and question how they would behave in this situation, *Operation Black Antler* creates a unique perspective on the murky world of police surveillance and state intrusion.

Matt Adams, co-founder of Blast Theory, says: 'Wikileaks, the Snowden affair and the revelations about the Special Demonstration Squad show that secret forces within the state have little respect for the law. In *Operation Black Antler* you are given power and control and you have to choose how to exercise it.'

'It may be a work of fiction but our experience is that works of this kind have a powerful effect on those who take part. It is not a world of easy certainties. It is challenging and it is not for everyone. But, for 25 years, we have been trying to create new experiences that are deeply engaged with society and politics.'

Jem Wall, co-founder of Hydrocracker, says: 'Rather than *tell* an audience who sit passively and watch what we think, *Operation Black Antler* gives the audience the chance to make up their own mind as they wrestle with their own moral and ethical choices in a carefully constructed fictional world. How far is the state justified in lying to protect its citizens? And to what extent? These are the questions we want people to ask themselves after seeing this piece.'

Established in 1967, Brighton Festival has become one of the city's most enduring symbols of inventiveness and celebration over the past half century. The inaugural programme included the first ever exhibition of Concrete Poetry in the UK, a 'Kinetic labyrinth' on the West pier, and a site specific project which attempted to 'change the colour of the sea' alongside performances by Laurence Olivier, Anthony Hopkins and Yehudi Menuhin. Now one of Europe's leading arts festivals, Brighton Festival is known for its ambitious and daring programme that aims to make the most of the city's distinctive cultural atmosphere.

Co-commissioned by Ideas Test and Brighton Festival, *Operation Black Antler* has been developed with support from Arts Council England and in partnership with Dramatic Resources.

For further information, press tickets, interviews and images, please contact Chloe Barker, PR Consultant, on 07921 866109 or at chloegudrun@live.co.uk or Emma Robertson Head of Press & PR, Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival at emma.robertson@brightonfestival.org or on 01273 260803/07813 521104.

Notes to Editors

Blast Theory has been making interactive artworks that invite you to question your place in society for 25 years. Renowned internationally as one of the most adventurous artists' groups creating groundbreaking new forms of performance and interactive art, the group has created work for the Venice Biennale and Sundance Film Festival. Led by **Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr** and **Nick Tandavanitj**, the group's work explores the social and political aspects of technology. Drawing on popular culture and games, the work often blurs the boundaries between the real and the fictional.

[@blasttheory](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk)

Hydrocracker creates unique performances in unusual spaces. Hydrocracker is interested in collaborative work, and in exploring how contemporary politics – its machinery and constructs – affects how we all live, particularly in the field of human rights and social justice. The company is happy working on piers, in police cells, town halls, and restaurants; but retain a robust acting process that enables them to mine the foundations of the text and immerse the audience in an intense experience.

Hydrocracker is led by Artistic Directors **Jem Wall** and **Richard Hahlo**. The company's patron is Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion - Britain's only Green Party MP. Hydrocracker is an Associate Company of Brighton Dome and Festival.

[@hydrocrackerco](http://www.hydrocracker.co.uk)

Brighton Festival is England's largest and most established annual curated multi-arts festival, which takes place across three weeks in the city each May. It is a major milestone in the international cultural calendar and 2016 marks a landmark in its history with the 50th edition of Brighton Festival. Each year Brighton Festival attracts inspiring and internationally significant Guest Directors who bring cohesion to the artistic programme with British sculptor Anish Kapoor as inaugural curator in 2009 followed by the Godfather of modern music Brian Eno in 2010, the Burmese Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in 2011, actress and Human Rights campaigner Vanessa Redgrave in 2012, poet, author and former Children's Laureate Michael Rosen in 2013, choreographer, composer, musician and performer Hofesh Shechter in 2014 and award-winning author Ali Smith in 2015. This year's Guest Director is the pioneering artist and musician Laurie Anderson.

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