

VINCENT DANCE THEATRE

BROKEN CHORDS CONTEXTUALISING PACK

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VINCENT DANCE THEATRE

COMPANY INFORMATION

Founded in 1994, and based in Sheffield, **Vincent Dance Theatre (VDT)** produces devised dance theatre work in a variety of media, and on a variety of scales, touring the UK and abroad. The company has produced twelve original full-length productions to date, live, video and interactive installations, short films and video works, art publications and a large and informative website.

Vincent Dance Theatre is a diverse company with an international outlook. The company works as an ensemble and places great emphasis on the personal contributions, individual physicalities and cultural histories of the company members involved.

VDT's touring work is raw, passionate, humorous, emotionally bold and physically demanding. The work challenges conventional expectations of what dance can be, jamming together sophisticated physicality with theatricality, live and originally composed music and visually outstanding scenography to find a language that often moves and surprises audiences with its emotional impact.

The company is also involved in a wide range of teaching practice in professional development, community and formal education contexts. VDT also supports the development of dance artists based in Yorkshire and the UK through mentoring and apprenticeship schemes.

BROKEN CHORDS

Created in summer 2005, **Broken Chords** is a passionate, hilarious and subversive portrait of breaking up and breaking down, performed by a spirited ensemble of eight multi-talented performers.

With a huge chandelier hanging overhead and surrounded by rows of wooden chairs, musicians dance and dancers play out the experience of living through the Artistic Director's divorce with rebellious and hysterical results.

Teasing the audience at every turn, **Broken Chords** is a visually striking production, featuring a beautiful, original soundtrack with live violin and cello. Combining wickedly black humour with highly physical dance, virtuoso musicianship and playful theatricality **Broken Chords** chronicles the intimate relationships that shape our lives.



Charlotte Vincent and Lee Clayden in **Broken Chords**

GRIEF ENCOUNTER

Luke Jennings, *The Observer*, 19 February, 2006

Two years ago, the choreographer Charlotte Vincent was riding high. Her Sheffield-based company, Vincent Dance Theatre, was well positioned at the bruisingly experimental end of the spectrum (her best-known production, *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, was performed on a ton and a half of broken slates and was described by the Guardian as 'painful to watch and agonising to perform'), and everything promised well for her upcoming show, *Punch Drunk*. What's more, in a ceremony which she describes as 'a good performance all round', she had just married the man who designed the company's sets. VDT had been together for eight years, driven largely by Vincent's own grit and determination, and finally it looked as if everything was coming right. Deep down, though, Vincent sensed trouble. She didn't know what was amiss, exactly, but she began to put together a new dance-piece. Its working title was *Broken Chords*.

Quite suddenly, everything fell apart. 'My husband was having an affair with the woman who made our wedding cake,' says 37-year-old Vincent. 'They'd fallen in love.' Divorce followed swiftly. Vincent got through the *Punch Drunk* tour, but doesn't remember how. 'Being left, by someone I loved very much... He'd been my colleague, my friend and my husband. Every aspect of my life was broken.'

Her years on the road, however, had lent Vincent a certain resilience. 'I mourned my marriage like a death, and then I decided to take my power back.' She returned to *Broken Chords* and unburdened herself to her dancers, telling them how bereft she felt. 'All of their stories followed, there was a lot of crying, and I knew that what I had to do was to strip away the layers and distil the ideas into movement. To draw out the physical expression of what people were trying to say.' The end result includes spoken text, a list of apologies, eight dancers, two musicians, and 120 chairs. The action takes place beneath a huge chandelier. Like all of Vincent's work, *Broken Chords* is bristling with challenge, but hindsight and the choreographic process have allowed entry to a broad streak of humour, too. 'I'm back in my body now,' says Vincent, who performs in the piece at *The Place* from 7-11 March 2006.

**BROKEN CHORDS
CREDITS**

Direction and Design
Artistic Associate
Composed by
Additional Music

Lighting Design
Costume Design
Dramaturgy
Devised by

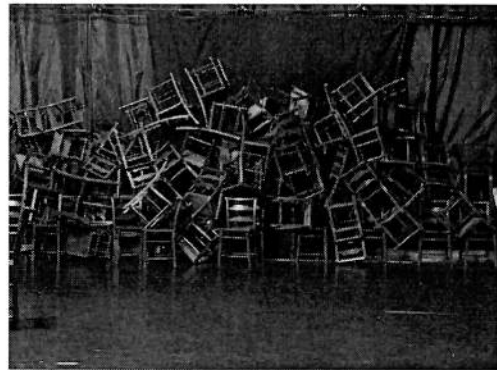
Charlotte Vincent
TC Howard
Alex Catona
Colin Elliot, John Avery,
Johann Sebastian Bach, Heinrich von Biber
James Harrison
Amanda Griffin
Ruth Ben-Tovim
Darren Anderson, Alex Catona,
Lee Clayden, TC Howard,
Patrycja Kujawska, Aurora Lubos,
Eleanor McDonald, Janusz Orlik

Broken Chords was originally commissioned in 2005 by Sheffield Theatres and the Nuffield Theatre Lancaster and funded by Arts Council England and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Vincent Dance Theatre is regularly funded by Arts Council England, Yorkshire.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S NOTES



Rows of chairs



Piles of chairs

When I made **Broken Chords** I was in a very dark place following the break up of my marriage to a man I wholly loved. Following the revelation of his affair and our subsequent separation, I fell into a deep depression. I had never felt like this before. I stopped finding any kind of pleasure in life. I cried all the time. I couldn't sleep and I couldn't eat.

Broken Chords was conceived in late 2004, when I knew my marriage was in deep trouble, and made in late summer 2005 after a long, painful and very public separation. This piece is full of momentary fusions, fragmentation and chaos. I nearly didn't make it. I nearly didn't make it at all.

Shortly after my separation from my husband, I met up with VDT's former Technical Manager who had recently separated himself and he said this to me:

You make a choice to be defined by events that happen to you, or to be who you really are, the person that people fall in love with. Don't be a victim. You have a lot of friends and a career that you are in control of. Put your anger into your work.

I wrote this down in a notebook and referred back to it whenever I felt too sad to continue or to function. His advice helped me to start focusing on creating something that reflected my sense of loss and grief at losing my husband, my best friend, my stepson, the family of my own that I had begun to desire for the first time in my life. Despite all the lies and confusions I had lived through in my marriage, I did not want **Broken Chords** to be an angry piece. I had started my choreographic career in 1994 making two duets that were full of aggression and politicised actions about violence towards women. I wanted **Broken Chords** to be beautiful in some way. I wanted the work to reflect the deep complexities of my feelings of bereavement and loneliness. Anger seemed too easy and too cheap. I set myself the challenge of making something subtle that carried some quiet beauty within it.

Broken Chords cannot shake off a sense of darkness and weight. Performers slide in and out of control, coming together and falling apart. The piece malfunctions and circles around itself, as the dancers and musicians struggle to hold on to each other and hold on to the work itself. **Broken Chords** is two pieces in one – a fictional, abstract dance that describes the dark side of love, loss and defeat, and a series of self-mocking interruptions and chaotic scenes that attempt to save the work from its own self-indulgence. These parallel and contradictory strands go some way to describing and dismantling the idea that the show must go on, at times in your life when the overwhelming desire is to stop.

How to produce something at a time of depletion and distress? How to avoid being too earnest and self-indulgent? How to find light within all the darkness? How to become visible when your need is to remain invisible? How to avoid fear swallowing you up? How to find a voice to express something in a time of silenced emotions and psychological numbness? How to start breathing again when you have not come up for air for months?

Broken Chords is a show within a show - the form and the structure of the piece reflecting a kind of schizophrenia that existed in me at the time. I knew I wanted **Broken Chords** to reveal vulnerability as well as virtuosity, weakness as well as strength. The title alludes to bodies and spirits (as well as chords) being broken, no longer in working condition, not honoured or fulfilled, destroyed or badly hurt by grief or misfortune, split apart by separation. The *concept* of the work is conjoined with the *form* the work takes. The piece takes place amongst 120

wooden chairs, which in various formations represent the order and chaos that takes place when relationships fall apart.

Look up. Wash the shit from your hands. Breathe in, breathe in. Stop crying. It'll be all right. Stop crying. Stop crying. Look up. The stars are shining. Everything will be all right. There is hope. There is hope. Look up.

RESEARCH WEEK



TC Howard in Casina Settarte, Italy

Two weeks before starting to make **Broken Chords** TC Howard and I went to Casina Settarte, Italy, to train with Rick Nodine (contact improvisation) and Simonetta Alesandra (Feldenkrais). This week allowed us to settle into our physical bodies after an exhausting and emotional six months, touring and working through our respective traumas (TC was in the Christmas 2004 Tsunami on honeymoon in Sri Lanka; I was going through my divorce). We experimented and improvised with clear focus on awareness, body work, watching, allowing space for things to happen, using natural breath, suspending breath, settling, spiralling, rolling, travelling, inverting, turning, catching weight, throwing weight, lightness, slowing down processes, suspending limbs and spines, breaking movement habits and stillness. This practice, away from Sheffield, helped us to find each other a bit and to create some essential personal headspace. Long talks in the night sharing a very hot room and some much needed laughter. I realised during this week that I had really lost my sense of humour over the past six months.

DEVISING PERIOD

After a week of dancing in the heat in Italy, some early ideas about making **Broken Chords** included that:

- TC might always be falling in and out of the action
- We should make transparent the things in the show that don't work as part of the show
- We could fragment the choreography as a metaphor for the fragmentation of a life
- There would be no narrative structure as such
- We should have a lot of space around the things that happen in the piece
- We should take our time with this work and let it be what it needed to be
- We could have a lot of watching and witnessing of things taking place on stage by performers not 'doing' anything
- The music should be the thing that pushes the movement on at times when the action grinds to a halt
- Aurora should somehow be a scene-setter
- I needed to somehow re-find and re-trust my instinct and my sense of humour.

VDT's work is constructed through discussion and through improvisation-based tasks that I set in the studio. These impro's throw up the fragments of ideas that become scenes through a process of distillation and rehearsal. For **Broken Chords** we shared many stories about loss. There was a lot of talking and a lot of crying. When we started to work physically, the weightiness of these stories was already affecting the performers' bodies. We seemed to accept quite early on the process of making **Broken Chords** that dance is a limited art form. We also accepted that this was a piece that was preoccupied with both the power and the limitations of dance as an art form.

An awareness of the limitations of the form allows you to ask explicit questions around the act of performance such as:

What is the appropriate language to express myself at this time?
How can I make this abstract language speak of deeply felt things?
How can the work be abstract (i.e. non literal/non-rhetorical) without abstracting the people in it?
What is the contract between the performers, the unseen director and the audience?
How can I be both object and subject of my own work?
Where is the 'I' in this dance for me/for the performers?
Who or what are these bodies representing here?
How do I represent the chaos?
How do I find order in the chaos?

Physical, textual and emotional thoughts that initiated discussions and became the basis for many layered physical improvisation tasks in the making of **Broken Chords** were:

Falling off centre
Collision
An anchor with someone being broken
Washed up/washed out
Moments of suspense
Looking up
Falling off balance
Running at something over and over again
Relentlessness
Being knocked down
Drowning in tears
Drowning in lies
Drowning in fear
Being knocked back
Slipping and sliding all over the place
Circling patterns
Releasing into someone
Releasing into something
Being lost
Sleepwalking
Emptiness
Being on the run
Being uncomfortable your own skin
Defeat
Failure
Urgency
Instability
Trying to reach another person who is out of reach
Standing up for yourself
Saying what you feel
Being let down gently
Breathlessness
Stillness
Hold me like you'll never let me go
Nothing fitting together any more
Being unable to settle down
Dancing
Fucking
Drinking too much
Telling stories
Telling jokes
Falling over
Starting over again.

From our discussions I made a list of scenes that formed a four-hour improvisation one afternoon. Events and accidents and choices that took place in this improvisation (alongside many other impro's in the first two weeks) sowed the seeds for scenes that made up the final show:

- A crying scene – two people
- A fucking scene – three people
- A falling over scene – all
- A trying to stand up for yourself scene – one person
- A collision scene – five people
- A scene of loss – one person
- A scene where a miracle takes place – seven people
- A panic attack scene – one person
- A bad choice scene – four people
- A being let down gently scene – two people
- A flirting scene – three people
- A very drunken scene – all
- A breathless scene – one person
- A scared scene – six people
- A silent scene – two people
- A confession scene – one person
- A scene of loneliness – one person
- A fucking good party scene – all
- A scene from a polish art house movie – two people
- A scene from the past – five people
- A scene from a film – three people
- A scene where everything goes tits up – four people
- A scene of separation – one person
- A bad joke scene – seven people
- A scene from a blockbuster – all
- A humiliation scene – one person
- A falling into bed with someone you don't even fancy scene – two people
- A hurtful scene – three people
- A thank you for loving me scene – six people
- A scene where you say something you will live to regret – all
- A scene of horror – five people
- A scene of shared joy – one person
- A dirty scene – four people
- A kidnapping scene – two people
- A scene with a strong sense of urgency – five people
- A suicide scene – all
- An unstable scene – all
- A stop lying to me scene – three people
- A weeping for all that could have been scene – one person
- A being caught in the act scene – two people
- A love scene that brings tears to the eyes – one person.

Things that I kept in mind in structuring and design of the show were the counterpoints between:

- Music and silence
- Music and movement
- Movement and stillness
- Movement and silence

and

- Removing the costumes
- Revealing the artifice and the lies
- Stripping everything away.

Some things we reflected on to inform the performing of this work were:

Look at me – how, and with what kind of eyes?
 How do I enter this space knowingly or steeped in sadness?
 Tell me a truth – or because we are performers is it just another kind of lie?
 Stop telling lies – audience as wronged lover – how much sorrow and apology can they take?
 Look at what is in front of your face – why do you always miss so much?
 Seeing things for what they are – not what you want them to be
 Stop moving – what are the states of rest and surrender within the work?
 Moving on – how to leave? If the stage represents a time and space in your life, where do I/the performers go at the end of this piece? What is the continuum outside of this work?

Things we discussed that became the two lists of texts within work:

Vows
 Rituals
 Betrayal
 Defeat
 Solitude
 Apologies, over and over again
 Apologies until you can't say sorry one more time
 I cannot see through all these tears
 I cannot speak your language.

I also kept going back to the sentiment from the best man's speech at our wedding, that as artists we are:

Always building something
 Spread out all over the place
 All over the map
 and
 I want to say this is a love story
 I want to say this is love
 A magic trick gone right.

MUSIC

The integration of music and dance is representative of VDT's inclusive and challenging approach to making work, where the performers' versatility is key and where unlikely skills are jammed together to surprising theatrical and emotional effect. VDT's ensemble encompasses dextrous practitioners, multi-skilled in dance, theatre performance, aerial work, mime, song, emotional commitment and live instrumentation.

Broken Chords has western contemporary dance jammed up against German Baroque music, English text, Spanish song, a flamenco dance solo, a gun fight, an eastern European influenced soundtrack, a cello played like a guitar and a bit of ballet thrown in for good measure. The production was originally designed to explore a long held interest in the contrapuntal, agitated and invigorating complexities of Baroque music. I originally wanted to bring together a violinist, a viola player, a cellist and five dancers to explore the agile music of Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber, not as accompaniment, but as integral to the action. I had been introduced to Biber's music by French Sculptor Gerard Renvex, with whom the company worked in January 2005 on a NESTA funded research project.



Music stand in rehearsal

Biber's violin sonatas, and especially a Passaglia for solo violin written in 1681, were strong conceptual starting points for **Broken Chords**. This is confident music that balances emotional, spiritual and intellectual interests. It is exuberant, invigorating and uplifting in style, full of broken chords and brilliant runs. With an emphasis on polyphonic and harmonic treatments of the violin, on counterpoint (a theatrical device used all the time in our own work) there is a grave severity about the music, a barbaric beauty that I loved and believed could somehow be matched by our dance theatre style.

The desire to use Baroque music in **Broken Chords** followed an instinctive use of Telemann and Bach in past productions, **Noli Me Tangere** (1995), **Punch Drunk** (2004), and further developed ideas that I explored in Taiwan in 2004, where I created **9xTable**, a piece for Cloud Gate 2 to nine pieces of Telemann's Tafelmusik.

With **Broken Chords** I particularly wanted to create something that would stretch and challenge Patrycja Kujawska, a regular VDT performer who plays violin, performs and dances. She had been a tragic-comic and larger than life diva in our 2004 production **Punch Drunk** (something that comes very naturally to her!), but Patrycja is a musician and performer of huge versatility and seriousness, and I wanted to see and hear her play in a different way in **Broken Chords**.



Patrycja playing Biber's Passaglia

I work with performers who want to be challenged out of their individual comfort zones. The style the company has developed is often called raw, but behind this rawness exists a vast pool of talent and understated skill. As Leo Sykes, a director of a company of musical clowns called Circo Teatro Udi Grudi in Brazil says

Improvisation is the basis for all of our processes... I never think of a performer as acting but as doing. Acting seems dangerously close to pretending whereas doing is less likely to be false. Musical Eccentrics, The Open Page, May 2006

The way we work often has something to do with pushing our technical skills as performers whilst not pointing out that we have these skills in the first place. It was an interesting and terrifying prospect for Patrycja to revisit her past as a classically trained violinist in order to play Biber's nine-minute solo Passaglia by heart. I enjoy her virtuosity in this scene, but it is framed within the piece to set a mood and do an atmospheric job. It introduces sadness and complexity within the first nine minutes of the show after her slow and heavy entrance into the space. There is no directorial finger pointing at her saying 'look how good she is at this'. Her performance of this passage of music is unexpectedly passionate and beautifully understated. As with the dancing in our work, which requires a lot of technical skill, showing off the skill is not the motivation for the performance. Technical skill is inherently needed but matter-of-factly placed within our work. If anything, we draw attention to the limitations of the musical and physical forms we work with, and in so doing break them down to reveal how difficult it is to 'speak' through abstracted forms.

Initially **Broken Chords** was a new departure for the company, a starting point being the exploration of a more formal approach to making work to existing pieces of music, setting our playful, de-constructivist approach against Biber's rich and oscillating structures and sounds. In a similar way **Punch Drunk** aesthetically alludes to the 1930's, but avoids becoming a set historical piece, I wanted to pull Biber into the 21st Century to expose the fresh, 18th Century modernity of his work, which seems largely unrecognised in the shadows of Bach and Vivaldi's well known pieces.



Alex and Patrycja play together

I met Romanian cellist/performer Alex Catona in Portugal and was utterly seduced by his musical talent, his humour, his prolific nature, and his general joie de vivre. He is a fabulous mover and a convincing actor. I invited him to join the company for **Broken Chords**, knowing that I wanted the music to be integrated within the work rather than sitting on the sidelines as an accompaniment. I wanted to give Patrycja a playmate to work with to push the musical aspects of the work.

I planned to work with composer John Avery in our usual way: I direct tasks in the studio, the performers improvise, we select and structure sketches of scenes and then show them once a week to John, who comes up to Sheffield from London for the day. We usually watch the sketch, talk about the feel of a scene, John goes away and writes musical sketches for each scene or idea we have shared with him, posts them up to us to try out.

It didn't really work like this with **Broken Chords**. Alex is a composer in his own right and as we developed the work, musical ideas grew alongside the dance for the first time. Although he is a unique mover, Alex's limitations as a dancer pushed his interests back towards music and Patrycja seemed to enjoy the musical stakes being heightened by Alex's presence. There was no stopping the organic development of music between the two of them. At the same time Alex became increasingly frustrated by the work John was sending up. He got drunk one weekend, stayed in his room and wrote 5 pieces of music for the show. He offered them to the process on a Monday morning and they all seemed to fit instinctively and closely with the ideas we'd been pursuing. Being deeply involved in the devising process, his awareness of what was needed in each scene was felt and acute. I liked his compositions very much and his contribution offered an opportunity for me to make a major discovery about how I had been working musically until this point. I think that perhaps if you are on the outside of a work it is harder to grasp the context of the piece for which you are composing, harder to have the emotional connection, theatrical insight and subtlety of understanding of what has gone into forming each scene. When scenes are presented to a composer out of context, as they were with John on his weekly visits, the process relies on a different instinctive response than if you are composing work from within the piece, from inside the working process.

VDT always describes our process as making work from the inside out. In a show where music was to be given more prominence than before, and an equal footing to the theatrical, dance or text aspects of the work, I realise with hindsight that it was a poor choice on my behalf to think I could continue to work with a composer on the outside for this particular production. So despite working on the production throughout the process, we used only one track of John Avery's compositions, as an accompaniment to Aurora's suicide scene, which by its nature sits on the edges of the production.

We also worked with Colin Elliot, an old musician friend of mine who had been through the Tsunami with TC six months before. We used one of three pieces he composed, the most moving piece which accompanies the last duet of the show. It was written in response to nearly losing each other in the Tsunami in Sri Lanka, and gave TC a real emotional base from which to dance her last dance in the show (and her last dance before leaving the company to become a mother for the first time).

I found that the music had meaning for me, it was something to do with the relationships, and how music gives us a narrative for our relationships. I admired the break into the recorded music and out again there was something very moving about that. There was an exquisite moment between the two musicians when they shared a look and then started playing together - that was a perfect moment. Audience Member, Lancaster



Patrycja playing, Ellie supporting

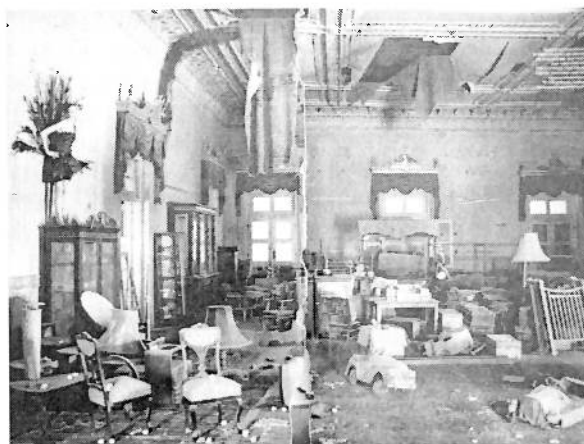


Alex playing, Aurora and TC looking on

DESIGN

How to make a piece without a set designer for the first time in 8 years? I was swallowed up by fear.

When I was designing **Broken Chords** I was caught in indecision. I had found a picture in Vogue Magazine of a beautiful old Indian ballroom, which had been partly destroyed by an earthquake. This had a resonance for many reasons. It reflected my familiar attraction to contradiction (ugly/beautiful; grand/washed up), it acted as a reference to TC's Tsunami experience earlier in the year, it had a faded glamour, it had a feeling that something had taken place here that was no longer able to take place. There is a broken down beauty of the space in this photo, a sense of history caught for a moment in time, the old fashioned kids toys scattered like debris seemed an apt metaphor for a state of mind suspended in disbelief, and the photo carries a sense of disbelief. You have to scan it several times to make sense of the textural and contextual contradictions within it.

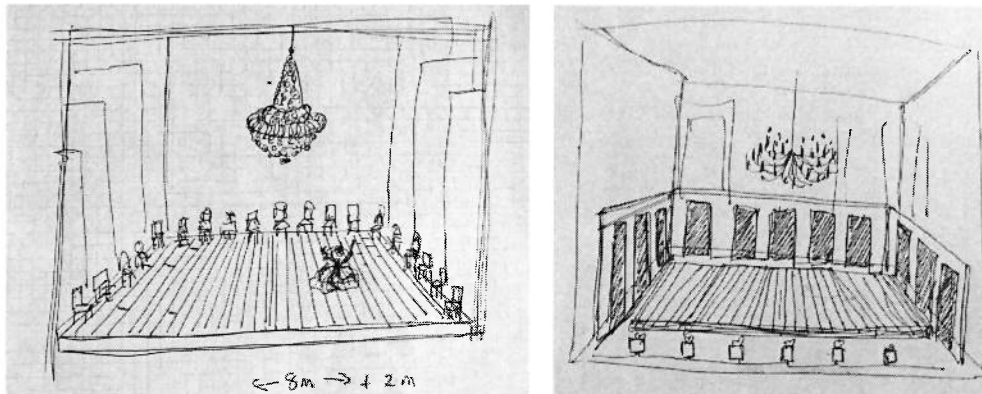


Vogue picture that nearly became the set

I experimented in the studio on my own a few days before the performers arrived, recreating a fragment of the Vogue photo, buying antique French chairs and covering them with soil, talcum powder and throwing clothes around the space. I was interested in providing the performers with a complex series of obstacles to negotiate, but something didn't stack up. I had known for a long time that I wanted a chandelier in **Broken Chords** as a visual statement and as a source of light, but couldn't decide whether to commit to the beaten up grandeur of a busy, rich and complex environment, or to go with something more Protestant, sparse and wooden with the possibility of emptying the space at some point. I worried the empty version would resemble too much the designs of my former husband/set designer. The wooden set was similar to something we had discussed building for another show.

Within the design process I couldn't let go of the ballroom idea. I bought some simple wooden chairs and tried to imagine a space lined only with these chairs. I wanted the dancers to be able to sit around an open space and feel like wallflowers at a tea dance. I wanted the performers to be able to watch each other. I wanted to be able to make a mountain of objects that looked beautiful and fragile at the same time.

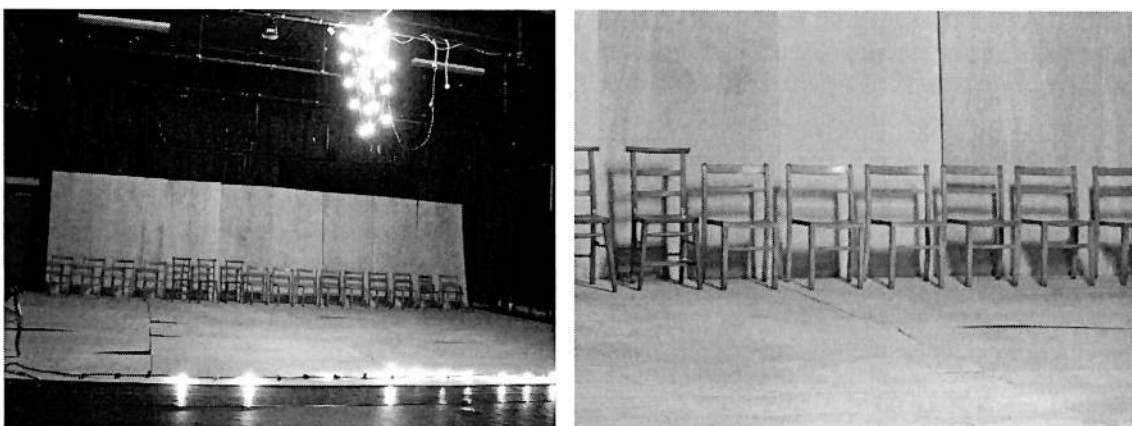
I wanted multiple obstacles in the space. I was of course also conscious of the **Café Muller** reference, but needed to be able to shift the chairs around within the piece to demonstrate the difficulty of adapting to a changing environment. I wanted the space to shift and change as the piece progressed as a metaphor for the reconfiguring of emotional space. From order to chaos/disorder to emptiness.



Early sketches of *Broken Chords*

I knew immediately that the simplicity of the wooden chair version was more authentic than the faded glamour version. This was partly *because* it heavily referenced the style of designs my husband and I had worked on for VDT over eight years. The aesthetic of VDT's work has been hugely influenced by the collaboration between us. There seemed little point trying to avoid his influence in this production, which was being made in response to his actions. Settling on the familiarity of the wooden aesthetic was a personal and professional risk for me at a time when I was trying to find my own voice.

This referencing of our personal and professional collaboration kept surfacing throughout the making process of *Broken Chords*. How to find my own voice? How to extract myself from his influence? How to begin again? Making *Broken Chords* was a tricky mix of motivations and influences. The work is an epitaph to our relationship, made without him in the studio, but with him at the forefront of my heart and mind. I have him to *thank* for *Broken Chords*. In a strange and painfully awkward way it is our most successful collaboration to date. In response to any criticism that the production is 'too Forced Entertainment' my response is simple. Of course it references their work. This is deliberate and unavoidable. There are too many ghosts in Sheffield and I could not make anything else in 2005. This creation and my divorce from him, his aesthetic, his voice, his influence and his colleagues are inextricably linked. The final line of text that ends the show is '*Here's to you, to us, no to you*'. It used to end '*This is all for you*', which speaks for itself.



Early set mock-ups in the Sheffield studio for *Broken Chords*

BROKEN CHORDS – A BREAKDOWN OF THE WORK (A WORK BREAKING DOWN)

Set on a stage with only a huge chandelier hanging overhead and lines and lines of wooden chairs filling the space, Patrycja Kujawska plays Biber's strikingly beautiful and complex Passaglia for solo violin as seven further performers enter the space. Each performer slowly enters the stage with a solo (except Janusz and Alex who enter together with a duet) that is slow, fragile and deadly serious.



TC's entrance



Darren jumping over chairs



Darren and TC

As the performers find their scattered, lonely places amongst rows of chairs, some church sounding chimes are heard and there is a sudden rush of energy. Eight people, hurtling across space, try to find someone or somewhere to be still, leaping over the chairs and crashing into each other in a desperate attempt to find a place to settle.

I lie down to be still but am constantly in motion. My limbs lie heavy on the floor but my senses revolve like a whirlpool. Closing my eyes only makes the experience more incredible and unsteady. A heady mixture of weightlessness, of collapsing, of seeing the world skim past as you dangle from an ankle, as you turn inside out and round about and the sounds that surround you distort as your head travels skyward at the speed of a train. The world looks different when you land with eyes and nose and heart close to the floor..... and different again when hands and arms come to collect you and propel you into space so the chairs and the cello appear to suspend in mid air. TC's blog



Aurora knocking down chairs

As the live cello and violin become more discordant, the dancers drop into a line sitting at the front of the space, leaving Aurora running and jumping over the stage wide obstacle course, knocking chairs over as she goes. The scene hurtles towards a screeching crescendo on violin until there is stillness and exhaustion and shock at the mess of chairs strewn around the space. Resuming her composure, Patrycja tries to explain herself with a list of apologies as Janusz and Aurora travel along the back and through the chaos of the space with a broken, slow duet that keeps falling in on itself and falling over amongst the chaos.

PATRYCJA'S APOLOGY TEXT



Aurora and Janusz duet

I'm sorry I'm always late
I'm sorry you laugh when things aren't funny
I'm sorry you laugh at me behind my back
I'm sorry you never have any ideas
I'm sorry you cannot ask for help
I'm sorry you lie about important things
I'm sorry you have no answers for me
I'm sorry you always want to shout
I'm sorry you are unable to share anything
I'm sorry you like to be alone
I'm sorry you are looking for someone to save you
I'm sorry you don't know where you belong
I'm sorry you only listen to yourself
I'm sorry you are always running away
I'm sorry you don't have any dreams
I'm sorry you can't talk without raising your voice
I'm sorry you cannot see what is in front of your face
I'm sorry you have nothing to say for yourself
I'm sorry you know nothing about me
I'm sorry you have forgotten how to be happy
I'm sorry no one matters but you
I'm sorry you cry every day
I'm sorry you hide yourself away
I'm sorry you are ashamed of your actions
I'm sorry that nothing you say is ever true
I'm sorry you don't love me anymore

INTERRUPTIONS



The line up game

The first interruption by TC happens after half an hour of sad and weighty contemporary dance. In the middle of Janusz and Aurora's sad duet amongst the scattered chairs, and as the audience are perhaps wondering if the whole show is going to be this earnest, dark and depressing, TC rebels against the production and against the director, draining away the lighting and the sound to expose the performers in their sorry state.

Huw cut the music. Cut the music. I can't take it anymore. Jim can you put the lights on? Can you put the lights on please? Where's the mic? Where's the mic? Huw can you put the mic on please? Is it on? Is it on... Can you put it on? Thank you. (Looking at the chaos of the chairs strewn across the stage, with a big sigh). Look at the state. We've been like this for 12 weeks. Nobody smiles anymore. I wanted this to be a love story. I wanted this to be about love. I feel I should explain, this is partly due to the director. She's not been having such a good time of it recently. She's been going through a divorce. And it's been tough. It's been tough on all of us, hasn't it guys? It's not been a barrel of laughs, has it? Can anyone manage a smile anymore? Anyone? Thanks Darren. That's Darren. He's 23. He's eager and he smiles more than the rest of us. I don't know if you've noticed already but I'm quite a bit older than everyone else up here. I'm 40, and I have to say that this whole process has taken its toll on me, on my body and on my state of mind... So, I think it might be time to lighten the mood a little bit. What do you think guys, shall we play a little game? There we go, Darren wants to. Come on everyone. Come on down to the front, and we'll play a game together. Janusz put a wiggle on, that's it. Let's gather together like we used to. This is a game we like to play when we're feeling a bit down in the dumps. It's called the line up game. This is where we line up, according to a different subject each time. So, has anyone got a subject they'd like to use this evening? Height? Weight? (a bit sensitive for dancers, that one). Number of sexual encounters? Sorry what's that Alex? Age? Thank you Alex. Let's play the line up game according to age. So, we'll have the youngest over there on the right, and the oldest, that'll be me, over here on the left. That's our left, which is stage left, which is your right as you're looking at the stage and our right, which is your left as you're... oh fuck it. Lets just get on with the game. We'll do it on the count of five because its always so much more fun that way. Are we ready... here we go...1...2...3...4...5... Well, that didn't work. Stay right where you are. Don't go away. I'll be back.

TC returns with a gun and insists that the dancers smile at gunpoint, demands that the 'fucking chairs' get cleared away and then directs the cellist to play and sing something more uplifting cheerful 'something that's got some more heart to it'.



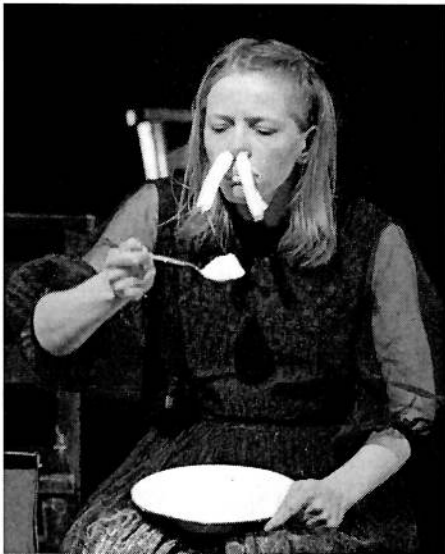
TC makes Alex play



Ellie's *real*/flamenco

Alex breaks into a Flamenco style interlude, and encouraged and relieved by the lightness of the moment and aware that TC will lose the plot further unless they comply with her demands, the other dancers follow through with a frivolous, ludicrous dance that slowly wears itself out. However Ellie responds to the music with a *real* flamenco dance (performed with deft skill), leaving TC exposed and upstaged by the rules of her own intervention. Out of embarrassment and duty, the other performers are ready to fall back into the *real* show they have left behind and having failed to set the theatre alight with her Flamenco skills, TC reluctantly falls back in line to deliver the next sad, romantic and moving duet with Janusz.

THE SUICIDES



Aurora – death by flour inhalation

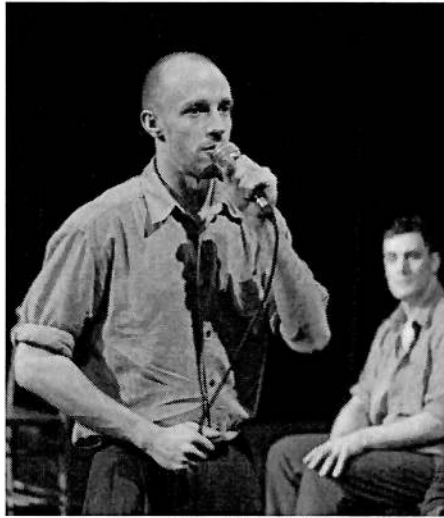
After this duet, Aurora, who is always somehow separate from the group (and who has shifted the scenography through her actions earlier in the piece), quietly and unsuccessfully attempts to kill herself via increasingly ludicrous means. Seven suicide attempts later, in a dark, funny and unsettling scene, she settles on strangling herself with a cello wire and slumping over the instrument, allowing the piece to move on.

INTERRUPTION 2

Taking the lead from TC's audacious step outside the *rehearsed show*, Darren now thinks its ok to interrupt the show a second time. As the youngest member of the company, he is keen to show off his other dance skills – mostly tap and jazz - to the audience.

We get taught not to feel and to make shapes. It's a big choice for dancers about where they go after technique. This show looks towards that idea. We've all been there in the jazz classes. TC Howard

What follows is a painfully naive thank you to all the people who got him to the point of performing in this show, including his Mum and Dad, with some painfully acute comments that '*this amazing world of contemporary dance is so much more and so much less than I thought it would be*'.



Darren interrupting the show

Saving the ensemble again from this unrehearsed interjection, Janusz and Lee attempt to recover and cohere the piece back together with a beautiful male duet, which continues to be broken up by Darren's cheesy Jazz phrases. After the humiliation of having their dance ruined, Lee physically attacks Darren and all hell breaks loose on stage. Ellie attempts to start another bit of the show, the musicians start to argue and stop playing (preferring instead to ask the Sound Technician to repeat Bach's Allegro Assai in D Minor ('Track 6 on the CD, Huw', yells Alex), Aurora runs about trying to appease everyone whilst trying to take cover by returning to her suicide mission, TC tries to calm the men down and Janusz drops out of the action. What follows is the most chaotic scene within the work, with the group at loggerheads, the choreography falling apart despite multiple attempts to thread together fragments of the past hour's worth of dance material from the *real* show, in an attempt to get the production back on the Director's intended track.



Lee's Bach solo

Lee (as the other mature performer in the company) finally gathers some speed and makes a bold individual decision to follow the music, reverting to a complex, neo-classical display of a dance language he knows all too well.

This *proper* dance seems to remind the dancers why they are on the stage and allows space for everyone to settle down again. This solo to Bach is positioned within the work as a statement about dance – if all else fails – do some steps you already know. Taking Lee's lead, TC rejoins the dance and the two of them find a way back to the Director's intended dance – a beautiful, considered and moving duet about togetherness and support, which brings the piece back together to its sad but satisfying conclusion.

The duets will get familiar but they are hard. I never want to go into the dancers gaze. Every time I climb up someone or fall down them or touch them it means something so even though it will become more familiar or more technical I will then be able to find more. TC's Blog

A SLOW EXIT



Alex ending the show

As TC is left alone at the end of the duet with Lee there is a sense of exhaustion and defeat. As Alex starts this final text, TC slowly walks the downstage to upstage diagonal in an almost butoh-like way. Loaded, thoughtful and very much alone in the space (which has been cleared of all obstacles) there are many moments where she is metaphorically and physically struggling to stay on her own path and on her own centre. As the other performers drain away, one by one, it is as though TC's leaving this place of chaos and darkness, still on her feet but moving forwards and backwards at the same time - into an unclear future - *'moving along the edges of a place with no middle. Slowly finding your way'*.

To acts of love
To acts of guilt
To acting the fool
To sleepwalking through life
To walking away
To far away places
And displaced phone calls
To words lost and found.
To deceit
To betrayal
To trust
To vows
To falling in love
To falling out
To falling over
To being quick on your feet
To tripping over the lies
To all the misjudgements
To smashed up dreams.
To a future that never began
To wasting time
To pissing on hopes

To shitting on doorsteps
To lying through your fucking teeth.
To the flashes of anger
To the strength of desire
To the drink
To the drugs
To spilt milk
To suicide attempts
To loss
To loneliness
To crying all night
To letting things slip
To being far too close
And being too far away
To fucking me up
To fucking me over
To fucking on tables
To not giving things a fucking chance.
To the stars falling from the sky
To the lights going out
To absence and longing
And no longing at all.
Here's to you,
To us
No, to you.



Slow exit - Charlotte in TC's role spring 2006

PERFORMERS

No matter how far we travel we find people who dance the same steps.

Broken Chords was originally devised and performed by Darren Anderson (AUS), Alex Catona (RM), Lee Clayden (UK), Patrycja Kujawska (PL), Aurora Lubos (PL), Eleanor McDonald (UK), Janusz Orlik (PL) and VDT's Artistic Associate TC Howard (UK). Inter-culturality lies at the heart of our make up as a company. Cultural difference both informs and is irrelevant to the shared human experience. Individual cultural heritage determines an individual performer's response to a creative task, but pain is pain in any language. As a choreographer I enjoy bringing different people together as well as jamming together differing dance styles, theatrical conventions and musical influences. By so doing I feel that we get closer to creating a language that represents the mixed up world we live in.

VDT's core performers TC Howard, Aurora Lubos, Janusz Orlik and Patrycja Kujawska exemplify the kind of independent performers who work with individual intelligence in dance. They can multi-task, are multi-skilled, they are willing to invest authentically and whole-heartedly in a process, allowing themselves to some extent, to be consumed by it. They are willing to be deadly serious and seriously funny with their approach to making new work. They are not afraid to be vulnerable; they share heightened states of curiosity and imagination. They know how to take emotional risks and are keen to develop their own individual expressiveness and languages. But above all, they are performers who know how to *play*.

For **Broken Chords** I knew I wanted a real mix of personalities, of skills and an equality of gender. Believing that the work would involve a more technically demanding level of dance, I invited Critics Circle Outstanding Male Artist nominee Lee Clayden to join the company on the recommendation of Lindsey Butcher, a dancer/aerialist who had worked with us on **Punch Drunk**. I saw Lee perform Rafael Bonachela's Place Prize winning duet in Barcelona, but had never been in a studio with him. I met Romanian cellist/performer Alex Catona in Portugal. I met former Transitions dancer Eleanor McDonald whilst working for Welsh Independent Dance in spring 2005 and had rashly offered her a job at the end of this process as her physical attack and technical precision had left a mark on my brain. As a general rule, I am not convinced by the auditioning process as a way of finding new performers to work with. I usually find people along the way in my personal activity as a practitioner, via workshops or teaching or whilst choreographing commissions for other companies. Australian newcomer Darren Anderson was the only performer in **Broken Chords** who we auditioned. In the pub after this audition, after a long chat with Darren, TC commented to me that he was the kind of person she could spend time with. If you work with someone for seven months of the year, this is as important as any technical skills a performer may have.

REWORKING AND RE-REHEARSAL

Charlotte Vincent (TC's role spring 2006)
Iris Heitzinger (Eleanor's role spring 2006)
Lindsey Butcher (Eleanor's role spring 2006)

After the autumn 2005 tour TC Howard opted to take some time out from performing and touring so Charlotte Vincent took over the role in spring 2006.

Unfortunately Eleanor McDonald was unable to perform for most of the spring tour as she was injured on stage during the second spring date. Despite heroically finishing the performance, Eleanor's injury turned out to be a hairline fracture. Without Eleanor for the rest of the tour, a replacement needed to be found and fortunately Iris Heitzinger (who performed in **Let The Mountains Lead You To Love** during 2003-4) and former **Punch Drunk** performer Lindsey Butcher were able to step in. Iris and Lindsey both did a fantastic job, and much credit must be given to the rest of the **Broken Chords** performers for supporting both of them into the role while continuing to deliver great performances in challenging circumstances.

In 2007 VDT re-toured **Broken Chords** performed by Darren Anderson, Stefano Fogher, Rachel Krische, Valentina Formenti, Patrycja Kujawska, Eleanor McDonald, Janusz Orlik and Lee Clayden.

For performers and collaborators' biographies please see www.vincentdt.com/collaborators.

BLOGGING AND DOCUMENTATION

For the first time company members created a rehearsal blog, documenting the making of **Broken Chords** and updated regularly during the devising and rehearsal process with performers' and collaborators' thoughts and photographs. The blog is available to read at <http://www.vincentdt.com/blog/broken.html>.

PRESS QUOTES



Aurora Lubos and Janusz Orlik

Broken Chords was about the most harrowing yet inspiring transmutation of personal pain into artistic achievement that I have encountered.... One wonders what her ex-husband thought of it. New York Times February 2006

Vincent pulls off a powerful feat Vincent pulls off a powerful feat – creating a moving portrait of grief while making us laugh. The Guardian March 2006

Brave, intelligent entertainment... slips easily between laughter and pain, loaded with clever post-modern ironies. The Times, February 2006

Virtuosic... audacious... strongly affecting. The result is extraordinary. The Independent, March 2006

*Hewn from the heart, it's a work of rare beauty... if there is a good part to breaking up, then **Broken Chords** has nailed it.* Metro, March 2006

Vigorous crowd pleasing choreography, as well as some exquisite moments of dark comedy. The Stage, February 2007

AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO BROKEN CHORDS

I was in the audience last night and just had to email you letting you know how amazing I thought Broken Chords was.

*Loved the structures employed at the beginning, the tension, the gentleness.
Loved the interruptions.
Loved the 'desperate' choreographer.
Loved the dancing too.
Adored the (empty) space in the work.
Cried all the way through...*

*After watching a lot of leggy, empty dance work... to watch your work was a pleasure... This is the best work I have seen in years...!!!! Thank you (Charlotte) and the company for making it!!
Rita*

I think about that beautiful opening sequence to the piece - with the dazed woman making her way blindly across the stage, assisted in her faltering progress by some guardian angel – a friend, a mother, her own willpower? And the fact that finally, reluctantly, she reconnects with her art. I was in floods of tears as I watched that. It was so understated and yet so accurate. Audience Member

Fragments of the piece remain with me - as do fragments of the hauntingly beautiful music which accompanied it. The woman staggering diagonally across the stage, in pieces herself, yet still trying to encourage and support her devastated partner who stumbles behind her, largely oblivious to her support. The breakdown of the network of friends - the pointless yet keenly felt disputes. The coruscatingly poignant final duet - memories of extraordinary tenderness, now lost. Audience Member

It was such a powerful way to rediscover culture... and such a tender reminder of art's ability to heal, reassure and connect us with the universal. I hope you and your company are proud of "Broken Chords". I hope that making it has helped you as you heal and overcome the pain. What doesn't kill us undoubtedly makes us stronger, more humane. Audience Member

It was moving because it held together and it could have fallen apart. It's clearly coming from a painful place and where it's moving, is in particular points where it only just about holds together. The points that threaten to pull it apart are where different levels of reality are in tension with each other e.g. when someone interrupts the action. The points of interest are when it moves back into dancing e.g. when Darren is pushed violently. I'd have been interested to see what would have happened if it carried on more if it had gone into danger. It's these after glow of events when the dancing then takes over, this was interesting because it is a fabrication of what's gone on before or becomes something else, like water to steam. Audience Member

It was so good. I liked how it captured outbreaks of involuntary laughter that comes from a split up, when you are very serious and everything feels important but then you can't help laughing because it's all so odd, you captured that well. Also the duet at the end captured the lack of resolution that happens when people separate; it's not a Hollywood ending where everything gets resolved. In the piece some gestures are incomplete, imperfect that is a great visual representation of the way that these breaks are never really resolved, never tidy. These are the most impressive of a long list of impressive and arresting moments. Audience Member

Very moving on so many different levels, it was challenging to watch, the manic peak at was incredible to watch from the stillness of the beginning. It was so moving and engaging. Audience Member

The mic interruptions eased it for me because I was thinking come on now this is getting so intense - they were funny and acerbic. Audience Member

QUESTIONS OF MUSIC

When Alex says put on the Bach 'cos its so perfect that made me think about the difference between an ideal of a relationship and a real one, in the show it was like the relationship between the recorded perfect sound and the real sound. Audience Member

There was a beautiful moment when PK in a way forced herself to play, like the relationship between a musician and the instrument you have to practice it in order for it to work. Audience Member

The music seemed to be deeply considered for me. I like the Baroque and folk music it supports a very expressive use of the body, not usually a contradictory one and in the piece it is the speech that does that. Audience Member

It's so good that there are string instruments because they are so heartfelt, so emotional an instrument to choose. It's literally pulling at the heartstrings. When the violinist started to play I was so mesmerised, it was so emotional. Audience Member

I liked the fact that you had two instruments, that relationship works so well 'cos it's all about couples. Audience Member

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE REAL SHOW AND THE INTERRUPTED SHOW

I loved the interruptions the first interruption worked especially because of what we've said previously and the second worked well because it was very different. It's like when you are in a relationship there are times you are inside it and times when you are outside it analysing it. Audience Member

It's about investment, when it breaks you are glad of it then when it goes back in you want it to be perfect technically. Is there a working through the material that is always on your toes- do you worry that it will become too technical? Audience Member

What was really good tonight was that you all had a physical nature about you, there were some delicious moment a hand to the heart and stroke on the leg, touch, breathing. It makes watching it very intimate you feel like you are seeing real people. Audience Member

I've seen the last four pieces of yours and I've seen the influence of the dancers skills on to the dance, there are influences of different dance forms on to the dance, you absorb it into the movement material of each piece like the flamenco bit. Audience Member

The text lists of feelings they clarified the piece for me I enjoyed the fact you did that. I don't know much about dance. Audience Member

I've seen what you've done before. I don't like physical theatre but you are the link between classical dance and physical theatre. Its not pretentious it's a fantastic show. It let you think. Audience Member

This is the best audience I've been a member of for years and years. Audience Member

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