

# The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak

A chamber opera for puppets



*(Photography credit: Barney Witts)*

## Information Pack

Available January 2017 Onwards

## Overview

***"The history of this monster is as curious as his habits disgusting..."***

A monstrous chamber opera for puppets based on the true story of Tarrare the Freak, an 18th century French revolutionary spy with an insatiable appetite for live cats, amputated limbs and the occasional toddler. Tarrare's grizzly story ends on the autopsy table - a defining moment in medical history.

Featuring over twenty puppets and a thrilling original score by internationally renowned pianist Tom Poster, *The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak* tells the extraordinary true story of one man's quest to be human in a world that sees him as a monster.

Tarrare was a diagnosed polyphagist (someone with an excessive desire to eat) and from his beginnings as a sideshow freak in 18th century Paris to his service as a spy during the French Revolution, he lived a life that is as compelling as it is unbelievable. Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre combines highly skilled direct-manipulation puppetry with soaring, lyrical music performed live by a bass-baritone/falsetto, male soprano, a pianist and a violinist to tell Tarrare's haunting story.

Macabre, witty and oddly beautiful, with a score whose influences include Sondheim, Britten and Bernstein, *The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak* is a unique and affecting show from one of the country's most distinctive and talented young puppetry companies.

***Supported by Arts Council England, The Wellcome Trust, Tobacco Factory Theatres, Bristol Ferment at Bristol Old Vic, and Theatre Bristol. Short-listed for the 2013 Flourish new opera competition.***



**Available January 2017 Onwards**

**Duration: 90 mins plus interval      For ages 12+**

**Watch the trailer: <https://vimeo.com/53101351>**

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## Synopsis

The show opens shortly after Tarrare's death. His autopsy is performed by Dr Baron Percy, his friend and doctor. A conflicted Percy dissects Tarrare in search of the golden fork that Tarrare believed had killed him and reflects on his sad life...

Several years earlier, we meet Tarrare as he works as part of a travelling freak-show for an unscrupulous Monster-monger alongside Marie and Celeste, a pair of conjoined twins. Tarrare swallows corks, snakes and cats as the crowd jeer. Celeste longs for Tarrare – who thinks of nothing but food – though her sister is less sure.

Tarrare is approached by a military recruiter, who, having watched his act, asks Tarrare to swallow secret military documents. When Tarrare demonstrates he is able to both swallow and regurgitate these, he asks Tarrare to join the French revolutionary army in order to use this unique ability to smuggle documents across enemy lines. Tarrare prepares to leave, excited at the prospect of demonstrating his value to normal society, while a heartbroken Celeste pleads with him to stay.



At the military hospital Tarrare encounters Dr Baron Percy, who tries to persuade him to stay and be cured. Percy's interest in Tarrare is initially clinical, as he has a large collection of medical 'freaks'. Tarrare refuses, excited about his newfound status as a soldier and military courier.

Tarrare's first mission is a disaster, ending in capture and near execution. Worse still, he discovers the military did not trust him enough to send a genuine message with him. He returns traumatised and dejected, asking Dr Percy to cure him.



The two develop a friendship, though Percy's attempts at a cure are both unsuccessful and increasingly unpleasant. Tarrare resorts to ever more grotesque ways to feed his appetite, drinking the blood of bloodletting patients and eating amputated limbs. Percy attempts to protect Tarrare from the disapproval of the other patients, but when Tarrare's burgeoning friendship with one of the other patients, an obese toddler, ends in tragedy, he allows Tarrare to be chased from the hospital.

Six months later, Tarrare re-appears in agony, convinced a golden fork he has eaten is cutting into him and slowly killing him. Percy cares for him and attempts to cure him. He is unable to do so and Tarrare dies. The fork is never found.

## Press

"...a gruesome performance, well served up. Go see it, I dare you!"

**Emma Windsor, Puppet Place**

"Tarrare is a witty, eccentric and beautifully realised production, that will haunt you from the start to finish ... [the company] take us deep into this macabre and picturesque world, guiding us blindly to its very centre, from which we cannot escape."

★★★★ **Female Arts**

"Genius"

★★★★ **Rosemary Waugh, Exeunt**

"... Tarrare was excellent – highly ambitious, and beautifully realised - and we're proud to have supported it."

**Ali Robertson, Artistic Director Tobacco Factory Theatres**

".. Wattle and Daub refuse to take the easy route and produce something quite unique, uncomfortably beautiful and emotionally charged. This is a company to keep an eye on..."

**Chris Pirie, Co-Producer Bristol Festival of Puppetry**

"The piece is richly layered. [Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre] have created magic through the careful concoction of puppetry and opera. The gruesome becomes fascinating, the disgusting becomes acceptable, the foul is humorous and the desperate is mesmerising, almost enchanting."

**Geraldine Harris, Exeunt**



"A very rich visual and aural experience that involved some great imagery and a cleverly written operatic script"

"Something really special"

**Audience feedback**

"I've never seen anything like this before"

**Audience feedback**

"Fantastic! ... fascinating, entertaining, funny and sad."

**Audience feedback**



## About the Company

**Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre** is a Bristol-based puppetry and visual theatre company that tells untold stories using music, grotesque and beautiful imagery, and the interconnections of puppet and puppeteer. Through exploring the ways in which humans bring life to puppets, masks and other performing objects, Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre are committed to creating engaging theatre which challenges audiences to find beauty in unexpected places and that continues to interrogate and justify the role of puppets in the theatrical space.

Their previous show *Triptych*, a trio of interconnected stories about love, loss and letting go featuring unconventional protagonists, was created in collaboration with T S Eliot award-winning poet Philip Gross and developed through Bristol Ferment at Bristol Old Vic, and toured widely between 2010-2011 including performances at Bristol Old Vic Studio, The Little Angel Islington, Mayfest, Bristol Festival of Puppetry and Suspense Festival London.

Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre is an Associate Artist at Tobacco Factory Theatres.

“Tobacco Factory Theatres has absolute trust in the talent of the company and the quality of its work, which is why we invited Wattle & Daub on to our Associate Artist programme for 2014 -15. The company’s highly distinctive aesthetic and commitment to making work whose subject matter is engaging with its form in increasingly fascinating and playful ways is complemented by impressive intellectual rigour and highly skilled craftsmanship. We’re really excited by what *The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak* offers audiences and believe the show will see the company making its mark on the performance landscape.”

***Carrie Rhys-Davies, Artist Development Producer, Tobacco Factory Theatres***

“beautiful, tender and strangely poignant”

***Kate Yedigaroff - Co-Artistic Director, Mayfest, on Triptych***

## The Team

**Sita Calvert-Ennals** (*Collaborator: Director*) has been a new writing and visual theatre director for the last 12 years. Directing credits include: Solo(Solo) (Bristol Old Vic/Theatre West), I am England, Life Savings, Ben Hur (Theatre Royal Bath), Shifts (Arts Council England/ Theatre Bristol), Open session, Full term, Family (Bristol Old Vic Ferment), Dorian's Second Life (Theatre West), Frozen (Sherman Cymru). She recently co- founded her own theatre company Invisible Ink who's first production was a Co-Production with Theatr Iolo The Magic Toyshop in spring '14. They have a new show in development - The Terrible things I've done - touring Spring 2016. Sita is also a part time lecturer and teaches across the MA and BA drama and acting courses at Bath Spa University. [www.sitace.com](http://www.sitace.com)

**Laura Purcell Gates** (*Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre, Associate Director*) has designed and performed with puppets throughout the US and UK, including with Michael Sommers of Open Eye Figure Theatre in Minneapolis. She has directed and performed throughout the US with companies including Shakespeare and Company, The Met Theatre, Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, and Jon Ferguson Theater, and was a founding member of Stilettos and Straps Cabaret.

**Tobi Poster** (*Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre, Librettist/Puppeteer*) was a founding member and Co-artistic Director of Lost Spectacles, creating and appearing in their award-winning production *Lost in the Wind*. He has directed puppetry for the egg at Theatre Royal Bath and Fine Chisel; artists he has worked with as a performer include Nimbus Theatre in the US, Fionn Gill, Hattie Naylor, Lee Lyford, and Full Beam Visual Theatre.

**Hattie Naylor** (*Collaborator: Writer*) has won several national and international awards for her plays and has had over forty plays, three short stories and an opera broadcast on BBC Radio 4/3. Recent theatre includes *Going Dark*, Critic's Choice in both the Guardian and Time Out, in collaboration with Sound & Fury, operas *Odysseus Unwound* at Tête à Tête and *Piccard In Space* with the BBC Concert Orchestra at the Southbank Centre, and the Olivier nominated *Ivan and the Dogs* for Soho Theatre with ATC.

**Tom Poster** (*Collaborator: Composer*) is internationally recognised as a pianist of outstanding artistry and versatility as well as a gifted composer and arranger. He has been described as "an unparalleled sound-magician" (General-Anzeiger), a "young lion" (The Guardian), and has had his compositions performed extensively, including two chamber operas. [www.tomposter.co.uk](http://www.tomposter.co.uk)

**Aya Nakamura** (*Collaborator: Puppeteer, Deviser*) is a theatre maker who specialises in puppetry. Originally from Japan, she has studied at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, and at Insitutit International de la Marionnette under acclaimed German Puppeteer Ilka Schonbein. Her first solo show *Urashima Taro* (with Rouge28 Theatre), won the award for 'Wonderful moment of animation' at the International Festival of Puppet Theatre and Movie Animation in Warsaw. Her current project with Rouge28 Theatre, *Kwaidan*, is being developed with support from Norwich Puppet Theatre, Horse and Bamboo Theatre and Incubate.



## Production Info

- For ages 12+
- 90m running time plus interval
- 6 performers, SM and 1 technician on the road
- 1 day get in (on morning of performance)
- 2 hour strike
- **Tech requirements:**
  - Playing Space Min. 8m wide, 5m deep and 4m high (75 – 300 seats)
  - House lighting rig, specifics TBC
  - Amplified sound

## Marketing Summary

We will provide:

- Print: A5 flyers, A4 and A3 posters
- Rehearsal, production and puppet building photos
- Trailer
- Press release
- Sample direct mail letters
- Box office briefing sheet
- Plus regular contact with your marketing department and liaising re. social media in order to reach sales targets



## Target Audiences

- Puppetry audiences and practitioners
- Opera and Musical Theatre audiences
- Contemporary theatre – goers
- Cabaret, sideshow and alternative circus audiences
- Drama/Music/Opera/Medical/History students – (secondary to postgraduate)
- Audiences who enjoy productions by:  
Faulty Optic; Blind Summit; Improbable; Tiger Lillies; Tête à Tête; OperaUpClose; Stephen Sondheim; La Clique

## Learning and participation

Laura and Tobi are both experienced teachers and facilitators who regularly lecture and run workshops for institutions including Bath Spa University, University of Bristol, Weston College, Puppet Place, Theatre Royal Bath and more. Education and facilitation has always been a core part of Wattle & Daub Figure Theatre's practice and we value the opportunity to provide rigorously structured and individually tailored workshops which are designed to allow participants to access their own individual creativity and continue to apply the skills they have learned beyond the workshop itself. We can offer any combination of the following workshops and events alongside the show, with length, participant numbers, and skill level to suit your venue:

- **WORKSHOP - Moving Figures:** This workshop teaches techniques for bringing puppets to life and constructing a direct-manipulation puppet from scratch. Using rudimentary and readily-available materials such as newspaper and tape, participants learn how to design, assemble and manipulate a puppet within Wattle & Daub's rough, image-driven aesthetic. The workshop culminates in small performances created by participants.
- **WORKSHOP - Puppets and Monsters:** Based on our popular 'Moving Figures' workshop and tailored to the themes explored in the show, this workshop teaches participants basic puppetry skills and how to build a rudimentary direct manipulation puppet, while exploring the theme of monstrosity, asking the questions, what is a 'monster' today? And, why do we need monsters?
- **EVENT - Performing the Freak: A dialogue between theatre and science about monstrosity:** This session, which can be tailored for length and number of participants, brings together the show's creators with medical professionals for a lively and stimulating programme of demonstrations, conversations and debates that cross the boundaries of science, art, literature, music and puppetry.
- **TALK - Post-show discussion:** This can focus on one or more aspect of the show in particular i.e. puppetry, devising, musical composition, medical history etc.



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## About Strike A Light

Strike A Light is based in Gloucester, and is a producing and presenting organisation. We work in partnership with interesting and exciting performance artists from the South West to support the creation and development of their work. We produce a biannual festival of inspiring new performance to light up the city of Gloucester and kindle the best local artists.

**STRIKE  
A LIGHT  
FESTIVAL** |||||