



## **Interview with Alex Walker and Hannah Liddeaux**

### ***What is Moon Broken?***

Presented with a talisman ticket and a canister for collecting moon tears, children embark on an intimate journey to restore a broken moon back to fullness. Travelling earnestly on hammock boats through the realm where sky meets sea, the imaginative expertise of the young people is applied to this other-worldly environment. They meet figures along the way: a pleading fisherwoman, a guardian of the galaxy, a doctor of the solar system. Sirens are sounded and urgent messages are communicated through torchlight and phone cables. Hospital trolleys appear, full to the brim with cuddles, candles, cotton swabs and milk droppers. Each moon organ lying in a crib needs a special young kindness to recover and rejoin its fellow parts high up in the sky. Then a grateful moon sings and sways. Thank you. Apple tea. Rest. The fish emerge and order is restored. We needed you and you came.

### ***What kinds of participation did Moon Broken involve?***

*Moon Broken* is an immersive participatory live-art performance for children aged 3-5 and their parents/carers. In the production, participants are charged with the task of using their childhood wisdom and expertise to heal the moon.

The participation in this show was complex and multi-layered. It was embodied and sensory, to engage children beyond a cerebral and imaginative understanding of the material and to offer multiple access points for children with diverse needs. The children particularly enjoyed the tactile interactions and we would like to extend the sensory dimensions in future iterations of the work.

Crucially, the very young children were positioned as expert leaders. Only they were equipped with the skills that were required to heal a broken moon. This endowed them with a responsibility that they rarely experience in everyday life. This responsibility was honoured with an open-ended, enabling framework that offered possibilities and options rather than prescribed and directed tasks. The simple, clear narrative bore a surprisingly wide range of creative responses from the children. Their individual temperaments led them to be present with the work in different ways, from the boisterous, immediate hands on approach to the deep and conscious observations of details from afar. We started to understand that participation doesn't always look the same - even the bystander experience can result in joy, wonder and a sense of achievement.

### ***Did the children's adults participate?***

Yes! The *Moon Broken* experience was designed as a journey of connection and togetherness for parent/carer and child. We offered adults opportunities to engage with the children in creative play and problem solving without the responsibility of having to set artistic or safety parameters themselves. They also had space to be spectators and witness the wisdom and capacity of their children to make creative offers, affect change on their environment and experience cultural agency. We would be keen to further develop the role of adults in the work, asking if the moments of spectatorship and joint active participation ensure adults have opportunities to experience their children as autonomous beings, and if greater geographical distance from the children facilitates this.

### ***What are the challenges of making participatory work with young children?***

We noticed that children's responses can sometimes be 'contagious'. For example, if the first child to board the hammock boats in the show expressed any hesitation or fear this could trigger hesitancy in

the children boarding future boats. Similarly, a robust and excited first departure triggered curiosity and anticipation in children with imminent departures. It was also challenging to cater for the various paces and rhythms of individual children because of the theatrical timings. We are interested in developing similar installations that feature a journey and mission but allow children to follow their own natural tempos and investigations.

***What was the effect of this participatory experience on families?***

Feedback revealed a lingering wonder and curiosity from attending children. They expressed pride in their healing prowess, a strong desire to repeat the experience and changed feelings about their role in natural environment. Families expressed a profound appreciation for the chance to witness their child endowed with and exercising a special expertise. These responses showed that we had achieved our goal of allowing children to tap into their incredible yet subconscious skill set and for their adults to behold and value that rich capacity.