

Will Fredd
theatre

JOCKEY

co-created with Emma O'Kane
with support in development from VISUAL, Carlow

photography Leon Farrel



Jockey Information Pack

Programme Note

Production Team

Press Release

Production Images

Reviews:

- Irish Times
- No More Work Horse
- Le Cool
- Examiner.com

Audience Reaction

Company Mission Statement



ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE - excerpts from programme
May 2015

Phillip De Burgh O' Brien was a racing journalist and bloodstock agent in the 1940s-70s. His granddaughter is Emma O' Kane. Racing is in the blood. We set out to prove this.

The past 18 months has been about people, horses, instinct and Emma's ability to adapt her dance training to a very similar discipline. As her racing coach Warren says: "she's a natural!"

People who work with racehorses emanate a sense of calm. They love the industry, but it is tough. It's not just a pastime, or a job, it's a lifestyle. Pressure, unpredictability, meticulous planning and luck can give you everything one day and remove it the next. Magic, adrenaline and obsession is what connects people to racehorses, from jockeys to punters. Like dance, the risk of injury to jockey or horse is a reality. Hopes, dreams, plans and money are all riding on the performance.

Racing is in the blood. We can't describe it, but we hope we can show it. Phillip's passion for racing started this journey. The generosity of the people we've met along the way has astounded us.

Place your bets.

WillFredd Theatre &
Emma O' Kane



Performer/Choreographer	Emma O'Kane
Director	Sophie Motley
Designer	Sarah Jane Shiels
Producer	Kate Ferris
Composer	Jack Cawley
Video Design	Kilian Waters
Horse Racing Consultant	David Donohue
Racing Coach	Warren O'Connor
Production Manager	Adam Fitzsimons
Stage Manager	Caoimhe Regan
Production Electrician	Iain Behan
Publicist	Sinead O'Doherty
Marketing Consultant	Ellie Creighton
Marketing Assistant	Aisling Murray
Media Partner	irishracing.com



In preparation for this show acclaimed dancer Emma O'Kane learned to ride a race horse for the very first time

WillFredd Theatre presents the world premiere of

JOCKEY

Exploring the physical relationship between the dancer, the jockey and the Irish thoroughbred horse.

Directed by Sophie Motley. Co-created with Emma O'Kane

15 & 16 May - VISUAL, Carlow

20, 21 & 22 May – Samuel Beckett Theatre as part of Dublin Dance Festival

28 May - Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray as part of Dublin Dance Festival

6 June - Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge, Kildare

Although she didn't know it, renowned dancer Emma O'Kane has been preparing for this show most of her life. Emma had never ridden a horse before but the first time she did she realized that all her years of dance training had prepared her well. She became fascinated by the similarities between jockeys and dancers, both honing the same muscles, both so physical, needing the same stamina, the intensity of training, striving to be the best and that same rush adrenaline of performing or riding in a race.

Not only that but the first time she went near a horse the trainer told her she was a natural, that horse racing was in her blood. Although Emma discounted the idea some research unearthed the fact that her grandfather Phillip de Burgh O' Brien who died before she was born, had been a bloodstock agent and racing journalist. From Phillip's writings to Emma's own experience of recently learning to ride a racehorse, Jockey explores the physical relationship between the dancer, the jockey and the Irish thoroughbred horse.

This extraordinary piece is the culmination of a year-long collaboration between WillFredd Theatre, Emma O'Kane and the Irish Racing Community.

Credits: Directed by Sophie Motley, Designed by Sarah Jane Shiels, Composition and Sound Design Jack Cawley, Video Design by Kilian Waters, Choreographed and Performed by Emma O'Kane.

About WillFredd: WillFredd Theatre was founded in 2011 in Dublin, Ireland. We are Co-Artistic Directors Sophie Motley and Sarah Jane Shiels, and Producer Kate Ferris. WillFredd's work engages with contemporary culture, actively inviting new audiences into the theatre. Through ethical encounters between artists and communities of place, space and interest, the company develop theatre which responds to and represents elements of these communities. WillFredd believe in constant evaluation and interrogation of our work through extensive Research and Development phases where work is shown back to communities we develop it with. The company have made three full productions to date: FOLLOW (2011), FARM (2012) and CARE (2014). Two new productions, JOCKEY and BEES will premiere in 2015.

'A constantly inventive, affectionate and beautifully performed production... it's outstanding in its field.' Irish Times on FARM

'respective, intelligent and inventive' Irish Times on CARE

'Every journey to the theatre commences in hope – here it is totally justified' Irish Theatre Magazine on FOLLOW

LISTINGS INFO:

WillFredd Theatre presents **Jockey** co-created with Emma O'Kane

- **VISUAL, Carlow**

Friday 15th May & Saturday 16th May. 8pm

059 917 2400 / www.visualcarlow.ie WillFredd Theatre / VISUAL Carlow /

@WeAreWillFredd / @VisualGBShaw

- **Samuel Beckett Theatre as part of Dublin Dance Festival**

Wednesday 20th May, Thursday 21st May, Friday 22nd May. 8pm

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: Thursday 21st May

CAPTIONED PERFORMANCE: Friday 22nd May

01 881 9629 - from May 5th / www.dublindancefestival.ie WillFredd

Theatre / Dublin Dance Festival / @WeAreWillFredd / @DublinDanceFest

- **Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray as part of Dublin Dance Festival**

Thursday 28th May 2015 – 8pm

01 272 4030 / www.mermaidartscentre.ie / WillFredd Theatre / Mermaid

County Wicklow Arts / @WeAreWillFredd / @mermaidarts

- **Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge, Kildare**

Saturday 6th June 2015 - 8pm

045 448 327 / www.riverbank.ie / WillFredd Theatre / Riverbank Arts

Centre / @WeAreWillFredd / @riverbankarts



photography Declan English



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photography Declan English



photography Declan English

Jockey: blood ties woven with passion | Dance Review

Dancer and choreographer Emma O'Kane traces a graceful line between dancer, jockey and horse and between own dance career and that of her racing journalist grandfather

Rating: 4/5

"It's about balance. It's not about strength. It's about technique. It's about rhythm. It's about feeling that rhythm. Stick to the rhythm of the horse." If Emma O'Kane substituted the word "music" for "horse", then this mantra would apply to her daily life as a dancer and choreographer.

But for the past 18 months, she has been riding racehorses and rhythmic concerns have become equine rather than musical. The move was inspired by Phillip De Burgh O'Brien, a racing journalist and bloodstock agent. He was also her grandfather, dying four years before she was born.

Her investigations have been borderline mono-maniacal. Not only has she ferreted out her grandfather's old clips, but she has immersed herself in racing by training to ride racehorses and tracking everything on a blog in Racing Post. Rather than a jokey hapless-dancer-becomes-jockey column, O'Kane seriously traced similarities with her dance career, like the meticulous training, injuries, and pre-performance nerves.

Jockey, created with WillFredd Theatre, puts this passion onstage, not with the raucous roar of the racetrack, but through a soft-spoken and multi-layered reflection combining movement, music, video and design.

The final section, where she describes, muscle by muscle, the physical sensation of riding a racehorse was impressive, but the emotional heart of the work lay moments earlier when she donned the race colours associated with her grandfather and sat gazing into space. In the reflective silence, she seemed fully placed in succession with blood ties she never knew.





No More Workhorse - Francis Winston

From the WillFredd Theatre Company and dancer Emma O'Kane comes this piece inspired not just by the world of horse racing, as the title suggests, but also by the work of the grandfather she never knew. Phillip de Burgh O'Brien, was a bloodstock agent and a racing journalist from the 1940s-70s but he died before Emma was born. Two years ago Emma made her first foray into the equestrian world learning to ride a horse and for the past year she has collaborated with the Irish Racing Community to develop this piece. Told through dance, video footage and voice over this is compelling piece. O'Kane really pushes herself and at times her sinewy frame is reminiscent of the racehorses her grandfather worked with. She takes us deeper and deeper in to the world of racing as she explores the world of her grandfather in order to better understand him.

This is a very visceral, raw and personal piece and it shows. O'Kane is fully committed to the performance and her passion draws you in and engages you. Energetic and powerful O'Kane fully embodies the roles she plays here. The music doesn't overpower the piece and the narrative develops at an appropriate pace. It doesn't go where you think it will which makes it all the more compelling and when the piece is over O'Kane looks both relieved and chuffed.

You don't need to understand the nuances of dance to draw something from this. At it's heart this is about the exploration of family and discovering who we are. One of the most original pieces that I've seen this is a beautiful piece that you will be processing for some time afterwards. With a 60 minute running time it doesn't allow itself to become stale and the pacing is perfect. Even if you know nothing about livestock or racing you will find this engaging. It is shows like this that bring dance to a wider audience and O'Kane is to be commended for it.

Le Cool

Dancer and choreographer Emma O'Kane indulges her equine side in this short gallop of a performance. Teaming up with the ever inventive Wilfredd Theatre company, *Jockey* is about O'Kane's discovery and exploration of the connections her grandfather Phillip de Burgh O'Brien had to the industry. He was a writer for the *Irish Horseman* and a bloodstock agent.

At the outset O'Kane repeats the mantra of needing balance not strength, of needing rhythm and technique to make it as a jockey. We hear snatches of words from the legendary commentator Peter O'Sullivan mixed with a genre sprawling score by Jack Cawley. Three screens behind O'Kane on the race course turf setting make the connections with her grandfather through typed letters and archive footage. O'Kane plays the jockey, the horse, the punter and the bookie as she commands the paddock. It's a short and engaging piece choosing a subject matter which lends itself perfectly to the world of dance.



Jockey by WillFredd Theatre/Emma O'Kane
Rating: * * *

Prompted by a desire to learn to ride racehorses, and seeking a deeper understanding of her grandfather, race journalist and bloodstock agent, Philip De Burgh O'Brien, dancer and choreographer, Emma O'Kane undertook a personal journey. 18 months ago she began training as a jockey never having been near a horse before. This coincided with a year long collaboration with WillFredd Theatre on Jockey, a dance theatre production that aims to show that racing is in the blood. Jockey aspires to explore the physical relationship between the dancer, the jockey and the Irish thoroughbred horse. This it achieves extremely well. But this also serves as its bridle, reining it in a little too tightly.

Throughout, Jockey stresses the mantra of rhythm and technique and parallels between dancer and jockey are exquisitely realised. This is ably supported by a clever set design by Sarah Jane Shiels, at times resembling a race course, at others a dance studio. Here O'Kane executes a series of fluid movements with focused, slow deliberation and director, Sophie Motley, sustains that same, focused deliberation throughout. Occasionally there are welcome bursts of energy as O'Kane lets loose, perfectly realised in the sequence depicting bookies and punters. But these are few and far between and, for the most part, a palpable sense of tension lingers throughout.

This is reinforced by the story of Philip De Burgh O'Brien, which recounts his involvement with the racehorse, Red Cardinal, who died tragically, with a little bit of De Burgh O'Brien dying that day also. This is wonderfully recounted using excerpts from Philip De Burgh O'Brien's own writings, interspersed with racing footage, projected onto screens to the back of the stage. Here we see the obsessiveness and precariousness of the racing life painfully realised, culminating in heartbreak. Tension, once again, is dominant, accompanied by an overwhelming sense of loss.

In the final sequence O'Kane meticulously describes the body and posture of the jockey during a race, telling us the experience is incredible. But this sense of the incredible never fully translates to the audience. In some respects Jockey feels like something of a departure for WillFredd Theatre. While the dance sequences are beautifully realised, WillFredd's characteristic playfulness and charm is little in evidence. This might have helped loosen the reins a little and release a real sense of the joy, energy and exuberance of the racing world to go alongside its more demanding aspects. Jockey preaches to the converted and those with the inside track will undoubtedly find much to appreciate here. For non-believers beyond the fences, and for devotees of dance, the opportunity to watch O'Kane's graceful and consummately executed dance sequences is well worth the price of admission.



WillFredd Theatre was founded in 2010.

WillFredd are Artistic Directors Sophie Motley and Sarah Jane Shiels, and Company Producer Kate Ferris.

WillFredd Theatre aims to create exhilarating theatrical experiences. Our interest lies in new beginnings, inspiring us to develop new ideas and re-imagine older ones, often using direct encounters with communities and individuals as a trigger. WillFredd believes in collaboration, inviting artists of many disciplines to work together from the very beginning of a process, with constant re-evaluation and interrogation of our work along the way.

WillFredd come from a unique place that is both artist and community led; we produce high quality theatre for an intelligent and engaged audience who could be first time theatregoers, yet may have provided, shaped or created the final material.

We have created seven productions to date, collaborating with a number of communities of Place and Interest.



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