

HOKE'S BLUFF

A PERFORMANCE BY ACTION HERO

“**Action Hero gather all America's defining iconography, load it into a cannon, & blast the lot over the floor. A delirious pleasure.**

-Fest



ABOUT THE PIECE

Hoke's Bluff is a theatre event performed in traverse. The audience sit as if on bleachers at 'the big game', holding mini flags in team colours as two performers play out all the roles in a re-telling of an underdog sports movie we've all seen a million times. 'Refereed' by a third performer who oversees the game and enforces the rules of the piece, Hoke's Bluff mimics the form of a hybrid American football/ice hockey/basketball/baseball game, whilst exploring narratives of hope and sentimentality, all the while asking complex questions about the stories we tell ourselves.

BACKGROUND

Hoke's Bluff grew out of a writers' residency, with a specific focus around narrative and the role of the writer in non-traditional theatre. Working for two weeks with the writer Nick Walker and without expectation of an outcome, we found ourselves writing a screenplay for a teen movie about a fictional high school sports team. We had no idea why, but we were strangely compelled by the task and the uncanny poetry that emerged from the banal dialogue, technical sports jargon, team names, town names and one-dimensional characters. At the end of the two weeks we wondered what would happen if we tried to stage this screenplay and Hoke's Bluff was born.

As part of the process that followed, we travelled several times to North America and watched American football in Oakland, ice hockey in Vancouver and basketball in San Antonio. We immersed ourselves in hours and hours of straight-to-DVD underdog sports films and teen movies set in small town America. Gradually, we fell for this hopelessly sentimental world and found ourselves genuinely moved by it. Hoke's Bluff is part of our ongoing investigations into Americana, taking its place alongside earlier works like A Western and Watch Me Fall as a means of interrogating what it means to be so influenced by cultural narratives from a continent 4000 miles away.

CONTEXT

Hoke's Bluff is a piece in angry love with its content. It is both full of energy and unfettered hope whilst acknowledging the cynicism and neo-liberal politic that drives the telling of these stories. But instead of approaching this material with an ironic sideways glance, Hoke's Bluff commits to its schmaltzy idealism and nostalgia with total devotion, asking what happens when we take hope seriously.

In this sense, Hoke's Bluff is an exercise in radical sentimentality. It pulls off the tricky feat of being both a critique and a love letter to America and the stories it tells itself. On the surface, Hoke's Bluff follows two teenagers in an American high school as their team goes through the familiar motions. Underneath though, Hoke's Bluff is about nostalgia for a world that never existed, the longing for simplicity in a deeply complex world. It's an arena into which we can throw the metaphorical object(s) of all our hope, in full acknowledgement of the futility of this action. But in doing so, perhaps we can share an understanding of what that hope *means* and where it comes from. And by throwing ourselves wholeheartedly into the task with idiotic abandon, and by inviting the audience to throw themselves in too, we start to unearth the melancholy that attaches itself to such futile expenditure of energy. The audience are invited to reflect on why we're 'all playing the game', and what it means to do 'whatever it takes' to succeed.

By shifting and re-arranging the trite conventions of teen movies, Hoke's Bluff navigates the curious territory in which our emotional responses to the narratives of the American Dream far outweigh our rational understanding of what those dreams represent and what America (and the wider western world) really stands for in the 21st century. It gently reveals the ambient violence that hides within the seemingly innocuous cornball stories whilst unashamedly revelling in the beauty of their banality. With meticulous attention to the aesthetics and languages of these superficial landscapes, Hoke's Bluff simulates the simulations with immaculate authenticity, but its liveness leaves gaps and breathing spaces where the jump-cuts and relentlessly edited montage sequences would usually lie. The performers' bodies, despite their best efforts, can't pull off the miracles that celluloid can. The absurdity of the action is foregrounded by the sweat and tears of the hopelessly dedicated performers.

“ It exploded the linguistic commonplaces and rhythms of a specific kind of Americana...



...it reformed them into strange looping shapes and re-performed them at one remove, constructing a kind of bi-directional queering of itself.

-Exuent Magazine

DOCUMENTATION

Video: <https://vimeo.com/album/1653138/video/123296807> (nb: the password is promoter)

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/104517653>

Photographs: https://500px.com/actionherolive/galleries/hoke_s_bluff

TECHNICAL

<i>Duration</i>	75 minutes
<i>Get in</i>	1 day with pre rig
<i>Get out</i>	2 hrs
<i>On the road</i>	3 performers and 1 technician
<i>Space</i>	Theatre space or other appropriate found space that has technical capacity (ie: a gym with wooden floors) with a playing space of 11m x 5m, with audience seated in traverse. Audience must be sat on raked seating, this can be created with chairs on rostra if needs be.
<i>Venue crew</i>	2 crew for get in
<i>Equipment</i>	The company can travel with excess baggage internationally if some items can be locally built and sourced. A full tech spec is available on request.
<i>Surtitling</i>	Hoke's Bluff is performed in English, but has been successfully performed with surtitles for non-english speakers. Contact the company for more information about surtitling possibilities.

ABOUT ACTION HERO

Gemma Paintin and James Stenhouse live in Bristol, UK, and create interdisciplinary performance together under the name Action Hero. For the past decade, they have worked almost exclusively with each other and have toured together to more than twenty countries across 5 continents to critical and popular acclaim.

Action Hero have performed in theatres, museums, galleries, bars and public spaces everywhere, from an old cinema in Bangkok to Shanghai Grand Theatre, from a blues bar in Texas to a Satan's Riders Motorcycle club house in Tasmania. Their work has been presented at some of the world's most prestigious festivals and institutions, including PS122 in New York, Theatre de le Ville in Paris, Brut in Vienna, Fusebox Festival in Austin, Culturgest in Lisbon, PuSh in Vancouver, CCCB in Barcelona and 21st Century Museum in Kanazawa.

Their ongoing interests lie in the iconography of popular culture and its use; both as a weapon and as a shared cultural memory, and although their work manifests in many different forms, the live experience is at the heart of everything they do.

Gemma & James have been shortlisted for several awards and won an Austin (Texas) Critic's Table Award in 2013. In 2015, a book of six of their works was published by Oberon. In 2016 they were in the final shortlist for the Anti Festival International Prize for Live Art for their contribution to the field.

CONTACT

Gemma Paintin
Gemma@actionhero.org.uk
+44 (0) 7717 096 813

James Stenhouse
James@actionhero.org.uk
+44 (0) 7515 378 689

actionhero.org.uk @ActionHeroLive