



1975-1976 Creating the Company

This file contains an extract from Gillian Hanna's Introduction to *Monstrous Regiment: A Collective Celebration* (Nick Hern Books 1991).

The period covered by this extract, and its title, have a corresponding period and title in the website's History pages.

The Introduction provides an extensive historical account of the company. It also includes extracts from the recollections of people who had worked with Monstrous Regiment, and had been asked to contribute these for the book.

Apart from minor corrections to dates, and the addition of Arabic numerals to the pagination, the original text has been left unchanged. This includes the periodisation and headings used in the book, which differ from those in the website's History pages.

There is a separate Archive file that contains the complete Introduction and other editorial material.

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Like many plays produced by the political touring companies of the 1970s, *Scum* came out of passionate commitment to principles, hard thinking about political objectives, explosive energy, careful organisation and near total chaos.

In 1970, a group of women had staged a much-publicised disruption of the Miss World contest. That was the same year in which the first Women's Liberation conference was held in Oxford. Germaine Greer published *The Female Eunuch* in 1972. The mythical American bra-burners were never out of the newspapers: women were back on the political agenda in a way they had not been since the days of the suffragettes.

More and more women were noticing that the famous sexual and political revolution of the 1960s just meant more better sex for the men, and commitment to left-wing ideas meant more

licking envelopes and making tea for the women. At best the revolution was passing women by; at worst it was rolling over them. The atmosphere of the time was extraordinary: the shivering excitement in the air was almost tangible. Women felt they were throwing off the shackles of a thousand years or more and finding freedom. We were going to be the midwives for a whole new era of equality. The fact that our grandmothers had had the same feelings fifty years before was neither here nor there. The more we discovered what had been 'hidden from history', the more furious we became, the more convinced we were that this time we were not going to rest until the world was transformed. We were going to change things irrevocably, and our daughters and granddaughters would be able to learn from our successes and mistakes. Somehow we would pass on our knowledge, so that the next generation could take up where we left off instead of having to start all over again.

'Women are revolting', the badge said. Everywhere you turned, we were marching, writing, performing, striking, picketing, occupying newspapers and men-only wine bars, arguing with each other and everyone else. What's hard to grab hold of and pass on at a distance of twenty years is the sheer exhilaration and excitement of the times. The Buzz. The feeling – the knowledge – that what we were doing was *the* most important political and social movement, gave anyone who was part of it, however peripherally, a real sense of their own importance in the world. The movement was visionary and idealistic, but it was also practical: arguments about equal pay, equal rights, nursery care were raging.

In the context of this whirlwind of social change, it was inevitable that the ideas being debated so fiercely would find their way onto the stage. Some of the routes by which they did so are reflected in the diversity of the backgrounds of the women (and men) who became the Monstrous Regiment.

Perhaps some of the difficulties I find in relating to these accounts of the company are to do with class and education. I wasn't a member of the educated middle-classes, who came to socialism and feminism via the universities and polytechnics of the 60s and 70s. My own route was a different one. And often I resented my inability to compete with other members of the collective in articulating my thoughts in recognisable well-honed phrases.

The resentment and frustration will probably never quite disappear. But nor will my memories of the positive joy of being one of the Monstrous Regiment.

MARY McCUSKER

*Company Member, Performer, 1975 to the present,
Executive Director, 1990-1991.*

During the afternoon of August 14th 1975, a freak rainstorm hit a very small area of north London. For three hours it poured down. Hundreds of people were left homeless as their basement flats were flooded, and in Gospel Oak, dinghies and rowing boats were being used to rescue the stranded. August 14th also happened to be the afternoon when a handful of disaffected and fed up actresses and musicians were supposed to be getting together to talk about setting up some kind of music theatre company. The meeting was in Gospel Oak. As the water level rose, and the one or two who had arrived before the storm really got going had to help to try and clear the blocked drain in the garden - to stop the water pouring in under the back door - we decided that this was one of those great ideas that had been rained off. No such thing. During the late afternoon and into the early evening, one by one, they all appeared: bedraggled and soaking wet, but they appeared. As we noted with glee, it seemed to be a wonderfully auspicious omen. It took us another eight months to get the company on its feet. Some of that original group left and others arrived before we opened the first production, but in the mythology of the company, The Afternoon of the Storm has always been the Beginning of the Monstrous Regiment.

'Atmosphere' is so difficult to pin down in words. There was ups and there was downs; and life is complicated; and memory treacherous.

DAVID BRADFORD

Company Member, Performer, Director, different periods between 1975-1983.

Who were we, and why were we there? The actors among us had been working in the professional theatre: Some were from 'straight' theatre and

television; some had moved from that in the early 1970s into touring socialist companies or TIE (Theatre-in- Education) or radical experimental groups of one kind or another. We were musicians, too, singers and instrumentalists looking for a way to express something beyond the sexist platitudes of current popular music.

Each of us, in our individual situation, discovered that we wanted to marry our ideas and beliefs with the work we did every day. In an action that was partly conscious and partly unconscious, we were groping our way towards another way of looking at our work: we were questioning what 'the personal is political' might mean in the arena of our own working lives.

At some point, the tension between what we believed to be true about women, and what we were being asked to portray on the stage as being true about women, was too much.

Rarely were we able to play women who lived on stage in their own right. We were always someone's wife, mother or lover. (*Someone* being a man, of course.) Our theatrical identity was usually defined in terms of our relationship to the (more important) male characters. We only had an existence at all because we were attached to a man. The male protagonist gave us a reason for existing on stage. As Mary McCusker was often heard to muse: 'If I have to play another tart with a heart of gold in a PVC skirt, I'm going to throw up.' And in bands we were required to be the attractive front; wear sexy clothes and sing. Musicians, real musicians, were axiomatically male.

If we ever questioned any of this, we were inevitably accused of 'whining'. Whether in straight theatre or left-wing groups, the Women's Movement was regarded with suspicion if not out and out hostility. (Trivialising women's aspirations was always one good way of trying to blunt the purpose of what we were up to. An interview we did with Erland Clouston for the *Liverpool Daily Post* started: 'You won't notice anything odd about the next play you go to, but that's just conditioning. "The average ratio's about six to two", the Monstrous Regiment sigh, filing their nails. Actors, they're talking about, men to women.)

Critical response has ranged from the belligerent to the rapturous, stopping at many points in between, including the patronising and disdainful. A common reaction of critics to women's work (often, though not always, male critics) is total incomprehension. Unhappily there is only room here for a tiny selection of the classics that have come our way.

'To use the Paris Commune as a vehicle for sentiments as simplistic and modish as those of the Women's Liberation Movement might seem to be politically irresponsible . . .'

JEFF NUTTALL,
*The Guardian on Scum: Death Destruction
and Dirty Washing, 1976.*

'The Women's Lib movement, in spite of the considerable advances it has made, is still at a stage where resentment dominates reason. Because it keeps striving for the unattainable goal of happiness through equality, frustration is its inevitable reward. Teendreams by David Edgar with Susan Todd at the ICA theatre has the authentic shrill note of so much writing about women's rights. When it is not railing at men as oppressors, it is haranguing women for failing to take part in the struggle. Being a mere male, Mr Edgar, as a Women's Lib propagandist, has the disadvantage of seeing too many sides of the argument.'

MILTON SHULMAN,
the Evening Standard, March 1979.

'The company - a feminist bunch who order up plays by women writers - managed somehow to produce something that was about people as much as women.'

PHILIP KEY,
*Liverpool Daily Post, October 1981,
on Yoga Class.*

'Sometimes you do tend to wonder if authors are losing their marbles. The search for novelty at any cost gives rise to some curious malformations.

Bryony Lavery's latest farce is a complete confusion. Miss Lavery belongs to that modern breed of bellyaching feminist who protest the role of women in what is believed to be a male-dominated world. Which is nonsense.'

RICHARD EDMONDS,
*Birmingham Post, November 1984,
on Origin of the Species.*

'Gillian Hanna is Calamity Jane, who maybe partly accounts for the success of the production by persuading the playgoer to forget for considerable periods that this is in fact an all-woman show.'

*A.R., on Calamity,
unidentified Scunthorpe paper, 1983.*

We were mirroring the journeys of many other women at that moment: realising that we would wait till Doomsday if we were waiting for men to come through with anything beyond waffle about women's roles, we took action into our own hands. As we used to say in another context, the slave owners didn't give up ownership of their slaves willingly. Freedom has to be fought for.

The commitment with which we had engaged in the political struggle that was set in motion in the post '68 period helps to explain why women who came out of left-wing politics sometimes found it hard to embrace the full force of feminism. It was hard to face the idea that comrades with whom you had worked side by side were actually guilty of bad faith. Hanging on to their own male privileges, they retreated behind a wall and threw darts over the top with 'The Women's Movement is a diversion' written on them. Considering our delight when we discovered the idea of women organising autonomously, it's odd that some of us still hung on loyally to so many of the beliefs associated with our male dominated past.

Like all radicals nibbling at the edge of society we were up against an old problem: do you try and infiltrate ideas into the body politic of the ruling culture by working within the mainstream (and run the risk of diluting the radicalism of the politics) or act autonomously outside the mainstream and run the risk of being marginalised?

In 1975, a body of our peers seemed to be showing us that maybe this wasn't such a big issue: companies like Joint Stock, 7:84, Pip Simmons and The Freehold had been waving two fingers at the conventional theatre world. To those of us who had worked in such companies, whether in socialist groups like 7:84 or Belt & Braces, or in what Chris Bowler called 'the lunatic fringe', there wasn't really an argument. As we couldn't get anyone in the 'straight' theatre to take seriously the questions we were asking, forming our own company was the only road open to us.

And, of course, we had foremothers to look to. The Women's Street Theatre Group had been founded in 1970. In 1972 the

Bolton Octagon's TIE company had devised and performed *Sweetie Pie*, a play focusing on the 'four demands' of the 1970 Women's Liberation Conference. (Equal pay, equal education and opportunity, 24-hour nurseries and free contraception and abortion on demand.) Then in 1973, the Almost Free Theatre hosted a Women's Theatre Festival, out of which emerged two groups: The Women's Company and the Women's Theatre Group.

How our particular group came to be meeting in north London in the middle of a thunderstorm was through a theatrical accident: I had been working with the socialist touring company Belt & Braces. We were recasting a play about the Kent coalfields in the 1930s. Naturally enough, there wasn't an enormous number of parts for women in it. Two, in fact. And I had the only good one. The other one was a cough and a spit. At the auditions, I was amazed at the women who came to see us. They were so talented, so full of energy and ideas. It was outrageous that the scarcity of work for women meant that they were prepared to audition for what amounted to a 'bit part'.

Someone pointed out to me that I was always whingeing on about 'women' so, why didn't I put my money where my mouth was? So I contacted several of the women who had come to the auditions and asked if they would be interested in the idea of forming a women's company. Those who said yes were invited to a meeting. And that's where it began. In a thunderstorm.

There was never any question but that we would set ourselves up as a collective organisation. The company was always conceived as a performers' collective. Given the political climate of the time, the legacy of the libertarian politics of the 1960s and the fact that most of us had experience of some kind of socialist organisation, no other form of structure was considered. We felt too, that collective organisation was somehow the natural way for women to work. It was a period when women were emerging from their individual lives, sharing their histories and stories with each other. Collective work and action broke down the isolation individual women experienced and showed us that we weren't mad or bad.

Besides, there was the spur of feeling that the collectives we had experience of didn't really work. We wanted to do it better; to show that a collective could work efficiently, and honestly. Honestly in the sense that we were aware of the dangers of the 'hidden hierarchy' that can lie beneath the surface of a group, unacknowledged but nonetheless powerful and controlling. We

wanted no one person to be so important that she could be considered to be the Artistic Director. Once the company had been established and was up and running, this issue of power and hidden hierarchies came up again and again. We were always conscious of it and struggled and argued and discussed the question endlessly, as the minutes of our company meetings show.

Item 8. Mouse Control

There are mice. Should we get a cat. Roger: Against it - responsibility and smell. Thinks we should get the Public Health Department. Gillie: Pro the cat. Much division. No decision taken.

Extract from the Minutes Book. September 7th 1977.

Although I brought together the women who came to the first meeting, I didn't really 'choose' them. They chose themselves (accidentally) by coming to the Belt & Braces auditions, and later re-chose themselves by staying with the group while others dropped out. At this very early stage there was one man involved with us. In the period between the first meeting and the opening of the first show nine months later we 'attached' other people to us in different ways. Some we knew of from other projects we had worked on. Some we found through auditions and interviews. Some just appeared.

Between August and December 1975 we formed the company proper. We were forced to work in a hand-to-mouth sort of way because we were scattered all over the country. We decided on the subject and title of the first play, commissioned it and invited a director to work with us on it; we named the company and began the process of setting it up as a legal entity. We drew up a 'shopping list' of possible future projects.

The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women is the title of a pamphlet written in 1558 by John Knox, the Scottish preacher and minister. There is some academic discussion as to whether 'Regiment' should more accurately be 'Regimen' meaning 'rule of', since the pamphlet was a virulent attack on Elizabeth I of England and Mary Stuart. We were unaware of any such controversy, and in any case we were rather taken with the image of armies of women driving around the

country in battered Transit vans putting on plays. It always amused us to note the different responses we got to that name. To us, it was half comic - whole serious, but definitely intended to produce a smile. We were often astounded at the number of people who failed to get the joke.

The heatwave of summer 1976 peaked during our week of one-night stands for Southern Arts. One week I had booked included a performance at the West End Centre in Aldershot. We were very aware of being in a town dominated by the military - after all we were a regiment too. I was half expecting to be taken away and shot as a dirty feminist. The patriarchal machinery was all around us but we weren't afraid. It was blistering hot but we had women's work to do, getting the Scum set (wooden flooring pallets and half barrel washing tubs and a cast-iron stove) out of the van and into the theatre. We decided that swimwear was the order of the day, and of course our personalised carpenters' aprons and gardening gloves (the pallets were full of splinters). Yes, we were feminists, but we had bodies, and we didn't care who knew it. The W.E.C. didn't know what to do for the best. Should they comment, or stay mum and pretend that all their companies did get-ins in bikinis.? Discretion won the day - or was it fear.?' Did they think we'd turn on them with our spanners and ratchet screwdrivers. After the show, one brave soul told me they'd expected us all to turn up in boiler suits and dungarees. So, victory to the Regiment. Another stereotype shattered.

CHRIS BOWLER.

Company Member, Performer, Writer, Director, 1975 to the present.

While we were involved with the practical job of setting up the company, at the same time we began the meetings and discussions which were to fuel its life over the next fifteen years; who are we? who do we want to be? what are we doing? who are we doing it for? More specifically, we embarked on the long investigation of our relationship to the two great social forces that motivated us: socialism and feminism.

An overview? I can't think of one.

Best thing; the company's ability to contain difference; the sort of rows and conflicts they had, in previous companies of my experience there'd have been sackings, scapegoating, all right-on justified of course . . . but not the Monsters. They went through it and survived, and I believe that is profoundly about them being women - mostly. I'd never experienced meetings with so much subtext, so much going on under the surface. But somehow it was all contained, and decisions were arrived at. Was this way to our advantage.' Not always, for sure, but that was the way of it and the chemistry of it, and I came to love them for it.

Another best thing – the policy; 'We are a collective; we do plays; women's experience centre stage; never more men than women in the company.' Great. Easy to remember.

Favourite show I was in: Dialogue Between a Prostitute and One of Her Clients. Favourite show I wasn't in? Vinegar Tom.

JOHN SLADE
Company Member, Performer,
1979-1982.

In January 1976 we made two submissions to funding bodies: one application to the touring department of the Arts Council of Great Britain asking for a guarantee against loss to cover the first tour, and another to the Gulbenkian Foundation, asking for money to pay an administrator's salary for a year:

'We are a group of professionals (at the moment eight women and two men) who have an urgent desire to redress the balance of male/female status and opportunities in the theatre. At any one time, 91.5% of the Equity membership is unemployed. The latest survey shows that average annual earnings were £835; this average was based on male average earnings of £1,031, while for women it was £583. These figures force us to review the whole question of women in the theatre . . . These statistics graphically demonstrate the acuteness of the problem. Despite International Women's Year and the Sex Discrimination Act, we don't see any sign that directors and producers are even aware of the problem's existence, let alone that they are attempting to do anything about it. So we feel that we are forced to . . .

The imbalance that we have experienced is not only in the scarcity of work but also in the quality of the work that is offered: there is no challenge, no satisfaction and above all no truth in representing women by an endless parade of stereotypes . . . We can understand the motive behind the commercial theatre's obsession with bare breasts and false eyelashes, but even in those areas where subsidy is supposed to foster a more intelligent approach we find too much of the same kind of thinking . . . We have created a nucleus of committed people . . . who will provide continuity of policy, and who will be directors of a non-profit distributing company limited by guarantee. However, we know that there are many who will have valuable contributions to make but who, because of other commitments, (in the case of women these are usually children) are unable to promise an undivided fifty-two weeks a year undertaking. We do not think they should be excluded because of this. We see as an important part of our work the creation of a flexible group of writers, performers, directors, etc. who will come together in workshops . . . it is essential that we should become a forum for ideas . . .

'We intend to start fairly conventionally by seeking to establish ourselves on a well tried circuit and then to branch out into more difficult directions. In this we are pursuing the logical continuation of what we have been doing in our various spheres up till now. (The Liverpool Everyman, Incubus, the Combination, 7:84, Belt & Braces, etc.) As individuals we have experienced the problems of trying to reach a new audience and we do not underestimate them. However we feel it is our task to try and expand these efforts into new areas . . . we want to find that audience which is to be found in launderettes or in front of television sets. . . . Women in the past have tended to organise themselves for social purposes, and we intend to tap these organisations as well as those more usual ones structured round places of work or local issues. We are already booked to play in community centres around the Liverpool area and we will be working hard to expand our work in this direction . . .'

The Company

Linda Broughton: Bolton Octagon TIE, Glasgow Citizens Freeway, Birmingham Rep, Cockpit TIE. Writer/performer.

Chris Bowler: Combination, V Theatre Company, The People Show, Belt & Braces Roadshow. Performer/fire eater.

Helen Glavin: Black & White Minstrel Show, West London Theatre Workshop, RedBrass, Red Buddha, Edinburgh Festival rock opera 'Shylock', musicals, pantomime, Farnham. Musician/dancer/performer/singer.

Gillian Hanna: Liverpool Everyman, Newcastle University Theatre, 7:84, Belt & Braces Roadshow. Performer/admin.

Annie Hayes: Birmingham Rep, Sheffield Playhouse, Lincoln Theatre Royal, Palace Theatre, Watford. Performer/singer.

Claire Luckham: Ipswich, Watford, Royal Shakespeare Company. Stage manager/writer.

Mary McCusker: Young Lyceum, Edinburgh. Glasgow Citizens, Welsh National Theatre, Perth, Newcastle University Theatre, Liverpool Everyman. Performer/animal impersonator.

Pat McCulloch: American Conservatory Theatre, University of California Repertory Theatre, Committee Revue, San Francisco & New York, Voice, Incubus. Performer/musician.

Chris Bond: Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Royal Shakespeare Company, Liverpool Everyman, Belt & Braces Roadshow, Northcott Theatre Exeter. Writer/performer/director.

David Bradford: Lincoln Theatre Royal, Ipswich, Royal Court Theatre, London, Bolton Octagon, Leeds TIE, Community Industry, Liverpool Everyman, Belt & Braces Roadshow. Writer/performer/director.

Serious minded professionals trying to show that we had a sense of humour. Fire eating and animal impersonation, ho ho.

We did get our guarantee against loss from the Touring Department, largely thanks to Ruth Marks, an extraordinary woman who believed in encouraging ventures she thought had potential. She worked in the Arts Council at a time when what you were doing on stage was more important than The Business Plan. Her vision and courage in backing artistic talent was unusual and she had an enormous influence on many emerging companies. Ruth died at an absurdly young age, and she is badly missed.

In the 1980s the priorities of an arts administrator are shaped by considerations of funding, marketing and managerial efficiency. Arts funding bodies, guided by the prevailing monetarist philosophy of the present government, set stringent criteria for companies, based on their organisational effectiveness and ability to obtain a range of sponsorship. This is the age of the business plan, the consultant, the strategy, incentive funding and expensive fund-raising training courses. The only growth area in the arts it seems and the only place anyone can make a decent living. Why fund an arts festival when you can fund a feasibility study on an arts festival. Why pay an artist when you can pay a consultant.

Of course efficiency and good management are important and were often less than they might have been in the 1970s. But if managerialism replaces commitment, excitement, the engagement of the arts and theatre with the deeply felt aspirations of both practitioner and audience, then theatre is empty and has nothing to say

SUE BEARDON

Administrator, 1976-1978.

The genesis of the company's socialism is clear enough. Our individual histories had dictated it. Later on, as this amorphous group changed into the company that produced the first show and therefore became the founding members of Monstrous Regiment proper, we tried to clarify our relationship to the socialist movement. That commitment to looking for a new audience, already expressed in our first contacts with officialdom, became more concrete as we tried to forge links with the Trade Union movement. So we tried to express our politics both in

theory and practice - in the content of the plays, in the way we organised our own working lives, and in our attempts to track down that elusive new audience.

How did this relate to our feminism? What was a feminist? Were we socialist feminists, or feminist socialists? We certainly weren't radical feminists. Indeed, we infuriated many women by insisting that we weren't separatist. How could we be, with men in the group?

After the kind of huge rows and conflicts that there always are in groups like us, the resolution would generally be accompanied by tears, touching and hugging - the sort of thing, of course, that chaps just don't do as well. In any case, I think I was pretty good at keeping my head down and avoiding direct involvement in the huge rows and conflicts.

The most obvious way it was different was in the work itself. The world of the plays we did was female-driven. Even the simple fact of having a large majority had a huge impact. This meant that I was generally playing more supporting roles, although we were scrupulous in trying to avoid centering anything we did around one character. Curiously, I think this made it in some ways easier for the men than the women. Our presence as a minority on the stage was very noticeable. As MR wanted to explore the tensions in relationships between women and men, it often meant that the scenes involving men were exciting and dynamic because of that fact.

*ROGER ALLAM
Company Member, Performer, Musician, 1976-1979.*

At this very early stage our feminism was on the whole formally unexpressed. Although many of us felt we were part of the Women's Liberation Movement, we had very little idea of what that might mean in practice.

Feminism was leaping in our heads, of course. To be a woman in 1975 and not to have felt the excitement of things starting to change, possibilities in the air, would have meant that you were only half alive. But the Women's Liberation Movement was not a political movement in the sense that we had known politics up to

that point. Those of us who came from a background of socialism knew how to join the I.S. (International Socialists) or the Communist Party (or even, God forbid, the Labour Party) but where did you go to join the Women's Liberation Movement? After all, the Women's Movement was everywhere and nowhere. There were no party cards, no enrolment formalities. Did buying *Spare Rib* make you a member? Were you a member because you read *The Female Eunuch* and agreed with Germaine Greer? Or had been to a Women's Liberation Conference? If you weren't in a consciousness raising group, did that mean you couldn't belong?

In the sixties I was a very junior part of the establishment world of the theatre. It was rarely referred to that I was female, apart from the odd comment about how unusual it was for a woman to be doing my job. Any conflict was mainly unconscious, and if I felt particular stress, I just blamed myself and my 'Personality'. (In fact, I was aware that it was a bonus being 'rare'; it was more likely I would get noticed. When I applied for an Arts Council bursary, I was very pissed off that there was another woman, Glen Walford, on the shortlist. So was she, I discovered years later.)

Late sixties, early seventies. Wow! Everything is up for grabs! Everything is changing! Not me. I read about it. That's ALL I did. I read about it. Monsters were there. They joined in. They were doing it. I read about them. They frightened me. I didn't know them. I saw them. To me they looked confident, sorted out, independent. They seemed to have no truck with the likes of me. Had I even faintly dared to get to know them, which I didn't, I KNEW that they would have found my fears, dependence, ambitions etc., completely stupid. I would be the subject of one of their plays, not a colleague.

CLARE VENABLES
Artistic Director, 1991.

It is probably true to say that feminism crept up behind us and smacked us hard on the back of the head. The nature of the meetings turned out to be dramatically different from what we had imagined. Yes we were going about setting up a theatre company, in as businesslike a way as we knew how, but we were also raising our own consciousness as we went along. Our

frustrations, our anger became inextricably tangled with our determination to get the project going. We set out at the very beginning to make theatre and over the weeks and months of discussions we discovered that we were involved in something much bigger than that: we wanted to change the world. At the time, this didn't seem like such an outrageous project. All around us, women in every area of the world we knew were doing the same thing. It seemed as natural as breathing.

But much more exciting than breathing. Exhilarating. The sense of being in the right place at the right time, in step with a great movement in history, *part* of history, making history ourselves. We were part of a huge wave of women and we were going to remake everything. It gradually dawned on us that we didn't have to go out and join any movement. We were already in it. We were the Movement.

Where did this leave us in relation to men? On the one hand, there was no question of not having men in the group. Our anger at women's position in the world was directed at 'men' in general, or patriarchy, the male-dominated system. We tried hard not to see the men we worked with as being part of the male conspiracy to keep women in their places (on their backs). Although we recognised that 'the personal is political', and although each individual woman was struggling in her own life to make sense of the political relationship between men and women, we always felt that in the context of the company, men were part of the problem, so they had to be part of the answer. If, as we often said, we wanted to dramatise the flashpoints between men and women, we felt that those flashpoints had to be visible on the stage. Our only stated position was the legal one we wrote into the company's Memorandum and Articles of Association: that Monstrous Regiment would never contain more men than women. Besides, our political backgrounds predisposed us to think of men as comrades. We looked on our project as a shared one: men and women working together to create a new kind of theatre, a new set of working relationships.

I recall walking into the rehearsal room on our first day of Alarms. I was excited - for some time I had wanted to work with a women's theatre company. And yet I found myself surprised by my own reaction - surprised that I was surprised to see so many women in a rehearsal room. A female lighting designer, female director, female

photographer, female playwright, female designer, female administrators, and only one male, who was an actor. I had known that this was likely to be the case, but the reality was nevertheless quite extraordinary, because during 13 years of working in theatre, I had never experienced this gender-ratio before.

GERDA STEVENSON
Performer, Alarms, 1986-1987.

In retrospect, it seems to me that the basic mistake we made was an organisational one. Given that we operated collectively, we went to extraordinary lengths to try and ensure that everyone's voice was given equal status. (When we found that some of us were being silent in company meetings, we discussed it and looked for strategies that would enable the person to speak.) We remembered how unvalued and silenced we had felt in male-dominated companies, and we were determined not to repeat the patriarchal pattern of dominance and submission. It was important to us that the men should feel an equal part of the company. In effect, we spent a lot of time making sure that the men felt comfortable, and falling head-first into the trap of mothering them. We were, as Helen Glavin says, 'too nice'. Not that the men found it an easy situation to be in. We were asking them to abandon the privileges of patriarchy and work side by side with women as equals. But the equality was blurred, in that it was informally clear that the women led and directed the company. Perhaps if we had been able to find a different organisational structure, things might have been easier; a structure in which women were formally recognised as being the leaders, having the power; in which the men were employed by the women. As it was, because we spent so much energy maintaining an equilibrium between the sexes, we scarcely had any left to examine the issue of relations of power between the women.

Male stage managers in theatres did usually walk straight up to the men in the company when we arrived, assuming we were in charge. After a few surprising interventions by suddenly tetchy women from the company I realised what a pain in the neck this was for them, and developed a blank, into-the-distance vagueness for those moments between the stage manager's approach and the woman's arrival. I

*know I could have discussed it but I chose discretion and a dumb look.
Fortunately the women, like the cavalry, always arrived in time.*

*JOHN SLADE
Company Member, Performer, 1979-1982.*
