

  
**EDINBURGH  
INTERNATIONAL  
FESTIVAL**

# Hard to be Soft: A Belfast Prayer

—  
Prime Cut Productions /  
Oona Doherty

Please ensure that all mobile phones and electronic devices are switched off, or put on silent.

21, 24 August 8.00pm  
22, 23 August 4.00pm

THE LYCEUM

The performance lasts  
approximately 50 minutes with  
no interval

Part of **You Are Here**

Supported by



**Culture Ireland**  
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# Hard to be Soft: A Belfast Prayer

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Performed by

Lazarus and The Bird of Paradise:

**Oona Doherty**

The Sugar Army:

**Aaliyah El-Salahi, Alexandra Myers,**

**Amy Lindsay, Cleo Jasmine**

**Luna, Collette Dance, Daisy Morcom**

**Evie Craig, Kerry Monaghan, Leigh**

**Vallance, Mariana Moreira,**

**Sienna Thomson, Silvie Furneaux,**

**Trisha Muco**

Gate Boys: **Jasper Harris, Max Lauder**

**Cormac MacLachlan, Stuart Manson**

Meat Kaleidoscope:

**John Scott & Sam Finnegan**

Helium: **Oona Doherty**

Choreography

**Oona Doherty**

Set & Lighting Design

**Ciaran Bagnall**

Soundscape

**David Holmes**

Film & Photography

**Luca Trufarelli**

AV Design

**Jack Phelan**

Production Managers

**Paul Rooney & Eoin Kilkenny**

Stage Manager

**Natalie Murphy**

Produced by

**Una NicEoin for**

**Prime Cut Productions**

*Hard to be Soft: A Belfast Prayer* is a co-production between Prime Cut Productions, Belfast International Arts Festival, The Abbey Theatre, Dublin Dance Festival and La Briqueterie. It was first performed at The MAC, Belfast for Belfast International Arts Festival in 2017.

*Hard to be Soft* is supported through investment from Arts Council of Northern Ireland, The British Council, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Culture Ireland.

# A Belfast Prayer

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'Dance as meaning-filled physicality ... more than another body-centred endeavour, cultivates a body that initiates as well as responds ... a physical practice that can both register and realise social change ... choreography's potential for social resistance'  
Aoife McGrath, *Dance Theatre in Ireland*.

A fiery renaissance, a glamorisation of a working-class youth. Northern. Irish. I moved to Belfast from North London when I was ten years old. I had a strong London accent, and had never played on the street. (Things were surreal, a kind of JG Ballard new world.)

I joined St Louise's Comprehensive collage on the Falls Road Belfast. A huge sprawling seventies Building over Bog. With thousands of 'Brown Bomber's' Squawking inside. 'Oh Mummy!' I heard it once used to be the biggest all-girls school in Western Europe. It was a city of young, awkward female energy.

Nestled in beside the Falls Graveyard, with black taxis heaving themselves past through the rain. The black taxis started here as an attempt to keep normality during The Troubles when the buses were off. They work like buses except you sit dead close, thigh to thigh, eye to eye, but also not at all. They've been heaving for years. Many of the girls practised Disco Dancing for competitions. They were harsh strong

girls. Bellowing their power out of their brown blazers. The movement was hard, fast and aggressive. Wiping sexuality and shapes out into space like weapons. This memory from school has inspired *Episode II - The Sugar Army*. The boys' school 'Christian Brothers.' Pristine short cut hair, shiny glossy sports gear. They kicked and howled at each other, the girls and the world. The girls roared back.

GET OUT BRITS clumsily painted on the walls. Sharing a 20p cigarette at the wee shop. Head down. Dancing. One-night years ago my brother was coming home from the pub and he found a young lad hanging, he had to cut him down, he heard the death growl. Years later he hears the growl of desperation coming from the back of the peeler van (police van).

My brother is a six-foot giant. My father is a six-foot giant: A 58-year-old nationalist from New Lodge. A Merchant Sailor. Strong Worldly man. They don't talk to each other. I love them both.

These are two extremes on either side of me. I heard once that Northern Ireland had the largest male suicide rate in Europe. I heard once Derry suffered the worst from it. This Northern broken masculinity has influenced me to make *Hope Hunt*, *Koper & Leib* and *Meat Kaleidoscope*.

Prime Cut Productions REVEAL Artist program let me go to Hyde Bank Prison

to share my *Hope Hunt* and try to learn from, collaborate with young male inmates. It was heavy duty, I'm not experienced enough, I want to go back and keep trying.

Masculinity, sectarianism, culture, class, sexuality and architecture. *Episode III - Meat Kaleidoscope* is a physical prayer of this, to raise male chi up, to make the desperate into deities. Harland and Wolff, Samson and Goliath, my Da, your Da, Zeus. My best friend's father the amazing John Doherty told me once about seeing a human eyeball frozen overnight that stuck to a wall after a shooting battle the night before (Derry). It was looking right at him! People grew up fighting. You can feel it in people's bones and the way they walk. The shape their eyebrows lie on their face. I think a whole generation of people here are holding an era in their bones, in muscle memory, in tissue. It can seep out in the bar into their Kinesphere and into others. A society aura that is holding. Holding ... Stuff. In the town, on the bus. In the night. At Super Shine. In Blinkers Hyde Bank Gym on the Newtownards roads I saw Coin rings on a rotation window display. Andy Town Surrealist Swimming pool. A wonky concrete. A proud one. Jesus where's Dali? He'd love it! Wails of youth. The screeching Wheels of Joy Riders Smicks, Hoods. Knackers, gypos, hipsters, City hall punks, spunky grannies on the GnT. Too early for Bucky? Bacon butty and Tea. The Towering sculpture of pellets. A city in flames, of youth, of virility. The fire of boredom.

*Episode IV - Helium*. An attempt to Open, Release and to evaporate like steam. Pure dance. My Friend Aoife MacAtamney told me a story once of Lazarus, he was dead for four days, his body stank as his flesh rotted in the cave. Jesus came and brought him back to life. Lazarus's sisters then retaught Lazarus to walk, talk, eat, piss and swallow. A huge fully-grown baby brought back to life. How painful it must have been for Lazarus to live through this, for his sisters to see him like this. The practice of Rebirth and being completely at the mercy of your own body. Gravity flailing like a soft pink baby in the air. Ridiculous and beautiful. Reminds me of Ketamine and MDMA. To transition from one person to the next through steam.

‘Taoist view the body as a miniature of the universe, filled with Tao, parts of the body have their counterparts to physical features of the universe’  
**Livia Khon, *The Taoist Experience* 1993.**

What if we took these aspects of Belfast? We heightened them in to a holy place? An existential anthem? I want to create a dance theatre work that abstracts the broken memories of my youth of Northern Ireland into a neon bright prayer. Welcome to a bright white limbo.

‘It is with their muscles that humans most easily obtain knowledge of the divine’ **Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational***

**Oona Doherty**