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ARTS VIEW:

Tony Earnshaw

Anyone at the London Stadium the other night could be forgiven for jeering when Justin Gatlin took the 100m gold medal.

It wasn't that Gatlin won. It was that Usain Bolt lost. And in that respect the watching crowd didn't get the ending they thought they'd paid for. Of course, it would never have happened in the movies. Not modern movies, at any rate. Maybe, in the dim and distant past, a daring writer would pen something that a brave director would put on film, which in turn would be permitted by a forward-thinking studio.

A good example is *Casablanca*, where the hero stands in the rain watching his lady-love disappear into the night on a flight to freedom, content to begin a beautiful friendship with an equally anti-heroic partner in crime. Bittersweet ain't the word. In these safer days of homogenised cinema it's a rarity to witness the unexpected in a film. Post-millennium audiences want their motion pictures neatly wrapped up in a metaphoric ribbon of hope. The hero gets the girl, the bad guys are banished into the sunset.

Witnessing Bolt's defeat and hearing the crowd's boos reminded me of that phenomenon dreaded by filmmakers, the preview. History tells us that some of the biggest movies have been tinkered with because viewers didn't like what they saw, and felt cheated. But I like my apple cart to be upended sometimes. And when it's done with panache the experience is all the better for it.

The device is called the sting-in-the-tail. Beloved of imaginative horror-thriller writers and directors, it has worked over the decades to pull the rug from under the feet of millions of cinemagoers. And when it works well, it's utterly devastating. Think Norman Bates staring and smiling into the camera at the end of *Psycho*. Or Bonnie and Clyde, with the loved-up criminals doing a jerky dance of death in a seemingly never-ending fusillade of machine-gun fire. That scenario is further employed in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, with our heroes entering outlaw Valhalla in a freeze-frame.

Arguably the daddy of them all is *Seven*. I remember savouring the looks of blank disbelief on the faces of my fellows when the credits rolled on that one.

The genius of Andrew Kevin Walker's script is in snatching away the notion of family. There is no happy ending for Detective David Mills (Brad Pitt), nor for horrified partner William Somerset (Morgan Freeman), who reacts on behalf of the wide-eyed, open-mouthed audience. Such is the power of daring to be different. What was in the box? Your guess is as good as mine...



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WATERMARK: The third part of Leeds theatre company Slung Low's epic project *Flood* is on BBC2 tomorrow night.

High tide

Slung Low have reached new heights with their latest project, the epic Flood. Theatre correspondent Nick Ahad reports.

Things I find difficult: maths. Boiling eggs to the correct consistency. Praising Leeds theatre company Slung Low highly enough.

It was over a decade ago that I first met Alan Lane, the leader of this innovative, inspirational really quite extraordinary theatre company.

Under the name Slung Low, a reference to the way the young upstarts used to wear their trousers around their backsides in that manner that so aggravates older generations, Lane and his cohorts staged an immersive piece of work in an abandoned shop in Bradford in 2005. A year later they were in Bradford's Lister Park with *Time*, staged outdoors at the park's beautiful Mughal Gardens.

It was in 2006 when I saw the company's work *They Only Come at Night*, a vampire story performed in a Bradford multi-storey car park, that I began to understand what they, and Lane, were doing.

They were creating, and this isn't to overstate things, a new kind of theatre. It was a theatre in which the audience is put at the heart of the action. It was, Lane told me on several occasions, a theatre for a generation who curate their own culture with themselves at the centre of the story. Using headphones, found spaces and epic stories, it has been one of the great joys of my 15 years writing about theatre in Yorkshire



to watch Slung Low fulfil its ambition and seemingly unlimited potential.

Each time I think the company has reached its apothecosis – blowing up a tanker in a car park outside the Lowry in Salford seemed a pretty high high point – Lane takes them over the top of a higher peak. Throwing actors off huge buildings in Hull, bringing *Moby Dick* to a dock in the centre

Having the BBC on board means many more people will be able to experience the company's work.

of Leeds, each time Lane and Slung Low up the stakes and increase the spectacle.

This year the company reaches what is surely its personal Everest with *Flood*, a Slung Low-created response to Hull winning the title of UK City of Culture. A story in four parts, Lane has spent huge chunks of this past year in the East of the county creating the different elements that make up the quartet that is *Flood*.

Now, the epic undertaking has reached its third quarter: a BBC Two broadcast of a play tomorrow at 10pm.

It might seem odd that a theatre company has incorporated a TV show into its offerings, but this is the great continuing joy of Slung Low: how they do what they do is not the important thing, what they do is all, and that is simply telling great stories with more wit, panache, imagination and fire (metaphorical and literal) than most other companies out there. Martin Green is the director of Hull 2017. He says: "We are very excited to be working with the brilliant Slung Low and the BBC on the latest installment of *Flood*, which is one of the most ambitious commissions for Hull 2017. Having the BBC on board means many more people across the country will be able to experience the company's work. I hope it will be an exhilarating theatrical event." So what is this theatrical event exactly?

theatrical event exactly?

TOP 5: Pick of the best stage



1 **A Brief History of Women:** The world

premiere of Alan Ayckbourn's 81st play is centred around a manor house with a story to tell. Begins on September 1 to October 7 at Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough. For tickets call 01723 370541.



2 **No Horizon – The Musical:** The Civic in

Barnsley is supporting the production about the true story of a blind South Yorkshire genius, the scientist Nicholas Saunderson, in the hope it will go on a national tour. For details visit www.barnsleycivic.co.uk



3 **Sincerely Yours – The Vera Lynn Story:** Vera

Lynn turned 100 this year and this brand new show about her life has an air of nostalgia and takes place on the afternoon of September 12 at the Kings Hall in Jikley. For tickets call the box office on 01274 432000.



4 **An Evening of Dirty Dancing:** A tribute show to

the much-loved movie is now in its seventh year and celebrating the music and the moves at Grand Opera House in York on September 22. For tickets visit www.atgtickets.com/venues/grand-opera-house-york/



5 **Pan in the Park:** An

outdoor production of Peter Pan from Wrongsemble theatre company and Creative Scene is taking place at Wilton Park, Bately over the bank holiday. Performances are on August 27 and 28 at 11am, 1.30 and 4pm. www.creativescene.org.uk



EPIC STORY: Slung Low's Flood Part Three: *To The Sea* will be broadcast on BBC2 tomorrow in the Performance Live strand.

Flood began in early 2017 with Part One, a short film called *From the Sea*. It told the story of a girl raised from the depths of the sea and can be seen online now.

Part Two was *Abundance*, a play performed at Hull's Victoria Dock in April by a vastly talented cast; it recounted the story of the apocalypse approaching the city.

In October, Slung Low will return to Victoria Dock for the grand finale with Part Four: *New World*, a play telling what happens when life begins again.

The overarching narrative of *Flood* is to look, and force audiences to look, at the growing refugee crisis in Europe and across the world and reframe the discussion to bring more humanity into the way we approach the appalling situation in which displaced people find themselves. As Lane says, displacement is like a disease in that deep down we think it

only happens to other people.

On Saturday night, Part Three: *To The Sea*, will be screened nationally on BBC2. Being shown as part of the BBC Arts strand called Performance Live, the

TV production is an enormous step up for Slung Low and will bring the company's work, deservedly, to a much wider audience. The executive producer for Part Three, Emma Cahusac,

says: "It's incredibly exciting to be working with Slung Low to bring *Flood* to network TV. This ambitious production challenges the audience and asks some important questions. I'm proud that the BBC is enabling audiences around the UK to experience it."

That, I think, is the most significant thing about this project. Lane will say that it is spreading the message at the heart

EPIC FOUR-PART FLOOD PROJECT

■ **Flood Part One:** From the Sea: A short film funded by The Space that supports artists to make the most of digital technology. Available at www.hull2017.co.uk/flood

■ **Part Two: Abundance.** The first live element of the project was performed April 11 to 15 at Victoria Dock in Hull.

■ **Part Three: To The Sea:** A story set in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event which sees England engulfed by water. BBC2, Saturday August 12.

■ **Part Four: New World:** A play in which the world is begun again performed at Victoria Dock in October. www.slunglow.org

of *Flood* – essentially, what if the refugees we see on TV spoke with English accents? – and that will be his primary drive for this project, but what's also very exciting is that this brilliant Yorkshire company is about to receive well deserved national recognition. "We've been overwhelmed by how the first half of *Flood* has been received by audiences. The chance to take a part of the epic to the rest of the country through Performance Live is something we're incredibly excited about," says Lane. "For an adventure to be made here in Hull's Victoria Dock and seen throughout the nation is one of the many opportunities Hull's City of Culture has delivered."

At the start of this article I listed some things I find difficult. I have an addition: seeing just where Slung Low goes next to top this latest epic achievement. Wherever it is, they can be sure I – and many, many others – will follow.