

Creative Activist Leaves Rich Legacy

Sally Katherine Rodwell, 16.5.1950-15.10.2006

Sally Rodwell was an inspirational teacher, artist and leader who generously shared her passion, energy and creativity. A consummate performer and skilled director, Sally was also a mask-maker, puppeteer, costume maker, writer, illustrator, publisher and film-maker.

Sally's desire to make challenging, funny and different theatre emerged in the early 1970s, and in 1973 she co-founded Red Mole theatre company with Alan Brunton. Red Mole toured nationally, then internationally, and was based in New York for many years. Sally and Alan returned to Wellington in 1987 with their daughter Ruby. Sally became the workshop leader for Hens' Teeth, which over the years presented some of the country's funniest women performers; and in 1994 she founded Roadworks theatre company, embracing other cultures to create rich performances.

Also in 1994, Sally and Madeline McNamara presented their show "Crow Station" at Magdalena '94, a festival of women's performance in Wales. Inspired by the women they met there, Sally and Madeline founded the Magdalena Aotearoa Trust and organised the 1999 Magdalena Aotearoa International Festival of Women's Performance, in Wellington and Paekakariki. This festival initiated a rich and ongoing exchange between New Zealand women theatre artists and our Magdalena sisters around the world.

Issue 26 of the Magdalena Aotearoa newsletter, edited by Sally, was published in September. Sally's editorials give an insight into the breadth of her interests, knowledge and concerns: everything from the sinking of a frigate off Island Bay to the plight of women in the ruins of Baghdad and what happens to obsolete computers, found its way into the newsletter's editorials. Sally was a member of organisations including Peace Movement Aotearoa, the Southern Environmental Association and the Island Bay Residents Association, and she was secretary of the Island Bay Surf Club – a beautiful rehearsal and meeting space.

Another of Sally's projects was the Save Erskine College Trust (SECT), which she established in 1992 to save the historic building from demolition. SECT became the first heritage protection authority under the new Resource Management Act 1991. Years of legal struggles ensued, throughout which Sally worked tirelessly, and a heritage order was finally approved in 1999. SECT continues to work for the preservation of Erskine building and grounds, with the backing of the Friends of Save Erskine College Trust.

The sudden death of her husband and creative collaborator Alan Brunton in 2002 was devastating for Sally, but she continued to work: she gained an ESOL qualification and almost completed a teaching degree; directed five shows with Roadworks; appeared as The Aleuromancer in "Demeter's Dark Ride – An Attraction"; edited six Magdalena Aotearoa newsletters; taught mask workshops around the world; and she was making radio documentaries about depression, and about West Papua. Her kete was bulging with important documents about creative projects and pressing issues.

Sally was intelligent, prolific, compassionate, inspirational, and – to use a word she often pronounced with great relish – "brilliant!" She will be enormously missed; but her memory, passion and energy will continue to thrive in Magdalena Aotearoa, SECT and many organisations and individuals around the world.

Helen Varley Jamieson

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Save Erskine College Trust: membership is \$6 per year, and donations are gratefully received. Email: save.erskine@paradise.net.nz, 5 McKinley Cres., Brooklyn, Wellington 6021, ph: (04) 384 4142