

How *Wolf's Child* sparked into life

I enjoy the ways our productions come together- they are a serendipitous collage of real places, extraordinary people, vivid memories, strange dreams and chance conversations.

An early memory of an idea for this show is from 20 years ago, when I was watching an animal circus in Crete. We don't see them any more in the UK for good reasons but in the middle of the ring I watched a lion tamer and an old Bengal Tiger – there was clearly a special bond between them. A special connection a little like love.

Wolf's Child explores our odd relationship with animals. We pet them, fear them and eat them; but we are also animal – every bit of us.

There's a particular story, which always breaks my heart – it seems to sum up the complexity of our relationships with other animals. The story of Callisto - where a woman gives birth to a boy but is then cruelly turned into a beast. Years later the boy grows into a hunter. One day a beast rises up in front of him and with the arrogance of humans he raises his spear. The beast sees him as her son and opens her arms. He throws the spear.

In 2013 I wanted to explore this idea a bit more. I knew of a man Shaun Ellis who kept wolves in Devon and with the help of students from NYT. He came down and told us of his story. For two and half years he lived with wolves. In all that time he didn't see another human He became part of the pack, hunting and eating with them and learning their language. One day he knew he had to leave them. He walked away and for two and a half days his wolf family called for him.

His experience and understanding affected our story. It became its heart. What happens if you don't walk away? *Wolf's Child* begins by looking through Human eyes at the beasts of the wild. Our story takes our audience on an emotional journey through enchanted woods and at its end, maybe just for a moment we see humans through the eyes of an animal.

It's been vital and enlightening to work with animal specialists as part of the development process. In April 2013, we also worked with a great and humble woman called Dr Chris Seeley – who shared her phenomenal knowledge of black bears. Chris sadly passed away in December 2014 and we'd like to dedicate *Wolf's Child* to her memory.

And finally, I have to thank our close and active partners NNF and National Trust and the brave participants from Norfolk who have given time and energy to the devising process. We can't do this work alone and your efforts have made my ideas spark into life.

Bill Mitchell – Director

May 2015