

MISS BRONTË

By BRAVE Theatre



COMPANY PROFILE

BRAVE Theatre was created in New Zealand in 2006. We have created six original shows including *Anything to Declare?* which played in Wellington and toured to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Other shows *Fight or Flight*, *The ¼ Pounding*, *Steel Ballerina* and *Jane Austen is Dead* have played in Wellington, Christchurch, Auckland, Sydney, Adelaide, Remote WA and Melbourne. Currently based in Sydney, we are planning to tour our solo show *Miss Brontë* throughout Australia.

ABOUT THE SHOW

Charlotte Brontë has a secret. In fact secrets seem to run in the family... How could an unmarried woman living in a secluded parsonage, with only her sisters for company, write one of the World's greatest love stories? She had tasted love and her secrets echo in the pages of *Jane Eyre*.

Miss Brontë tells the story of Charlotte Brontë, left alone after the death of her beloved sisters and brother. In an isolated parsonage on the bleak Yorkshire Moors, with only her father for company, she must find a way to continue to write.

Her publisher has asked her to prepare a preface for a reprinted volume of her sister's novels, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. She intends to tell the world the truth about her family. She explains their creative childhood, their wretched years as governesses, her brother's alcohol and opium addiction and their plan to become published authors under male pseudonyms.

In searching through her documents she finds a letter suggesting the existence of an



him.

unfinished manuscript by her sister Emily. In her search for the hidden document she discloses a secret of her own. Charlotte had fallen in love with her married French professor. She wrote love letters to him for years. All of her heroes, including Mr Rochester, and the subject matter of many of her novels are based on her love for

She explains the horrific deaths of her siblings, the glorious joy of their success and the bitter despair of being judged, not as an author, but as a woman. At the end of the play, the audience is left with a sense of the courage, tenacity and passion that made her work so alluring.

As the audience leaves, they are given a letter from Mrs Gaskell, Charlotte's friend and biographer, describing some further details of her life, including her short marriage, death and her professor's response to her letters. He had torn them to pieces and his wife had found them, carefully sewed them back together and kept them for the rest of her life. They are now in the British Museum.

Miss Brontë is based on extensive research into the life of Charlotte and her family. Seventy-five percent of the words come from Charlotte's own letters and novels. The rest is crafted by Mel Dodge through biographical information. A one-woman show,

with beautifully hand-made props and costume, it is an intense, absorbing 75 minutes of storytelling at its best.

The play had a three week premiere season at Circa Theatre, one of New Zealand's most esteemed professional theatre companies. It has also been performed- in an earlier development season- at Ayers House Museum, as part of Adelaide fringe. The play is suitable for performance in a 50-150 seat theatre, which is our preference, or there is the opportunity for companies to partner with local historical homes to present the work off-site. It has a clear audience and there is a large market for the work, as shown by audience numbers in both Wellington and Adelaide. We have a small, passionate and professional team. We are currently seeking presenting companies and venues for the work in both Australia and New Zealand.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writer/Performer –Mel Dodge
Director/Dramaturg – Lyndee-Jane Rutherford
Set and Prop design – Marisa Cuzzolaro
Operator/Stage Manager – Deb McGuire
Lighting Design – Glenn Ashworth
Publicity – Debbie Fish
Producer – BRAVE Theatre

BIOGRAPHIES

Mel Dodge – Writer, producer and performer.

Mel Dodge has an MA in Acting from ArtsEd, London. She has worked in most of New Zealand's professional companies over the past fifteen years. Her credits include *Uncle Vanya* (Chapman Tripp Actress of the Year Award, The Listener Actress of the Year), *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, *Rabbit* and *Mammals* at Circa Theatre. *Blackbird* and *The Perfumed Garden* for The Court Theatre. *Who Needs Sleep Anyway* and *No Moa* for Downstage Theatre. *Emma*, *My Heart is Bathed in Blood*, (The Listener Actress of the Year) *The Country Wife*, *Kiwifruits* and *Shop Till You Drop* for the Fortune Theatre. Credits for independent companies in Melbourne, Sydney and New Zealand include *Father Familiar*, *Shadows of Angels*, *Collected Stories*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Power and Persuasion-Selections from Shakespeare*, *Everloving Friends*, *Cosi*, *Medea*, *Revenge of the Amazons* and *Waiting for Godot*. Now living in Sydney, She has a production company called BRAVE for which she has written and performed *Miss Brontë*, *Jane Austen is Dead*, *Steel Ballerina*, *Fight or Flight*, *The 1/4 Pounding* and *Anything to Declare*. These shows have had seasons throughout New Zealand and have toured to Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Edinburgh.

Lyndee-Jane Rutherford – Director and dramaturg.

Lyndee-Jane Rutherford has worked extensively in theatre and television since graduating from Toi Whakaari/New Zealand Drama School in 1993. She has performed in over fifty professional theatre productions including *Who Wants to be 100?*, *Troy the Musical*, *Calendar Girls*, *Grumpy old Women*, *Party Girls* and *In Flame* for which she was nominated for Chapman Tripp Actress of the Year in 2003. She was also nominated for Supporting Actress of the Year for both *The Hollow Men* and *Mauritius* in 2008 and 2010. Lyndee-Jane is also a respected director having led successful seasons of *A Shaggy Dog's Tale*, *Who Wants to Be 100?* and *Penalties, Pints and Pirouettes* at Palmerston North's Centrepoint Theatre and *Love Puke*, *Becoming the Courtesan* and *Hamlet Dies at the End* at Bats Theatre in Wellington. She also directed the Australasian tour of *Songs of the Sea* for

the National Theatre for Children. She won the Chapman Tripp Award for Most Promising Director in 2006 with her production of *Love Puke*. She recently directed the third series of *Giggles* (TVNZ Kidzone) and a variety of field-stories for *The Erin Simpson Show* (TV2) and *What Now*. Last year she directed *Miss Brontë* in Melbourne for the Adelaide Fringe Festival, she also directed two productions at Circa Theatre, the hugely successful *Midsummer – A Play With Songs* and *The ImpoSTAR*, starring Jason Chasland. She was nominated for Director of the Year and her production was nominated for Play of the Year. This year she directs *Grease* at the Wellington Opera House for Wellington Musical Theatre.

Deb McGuire – Lighting operator and Stage Manager

Deb McGuire has worked in theatre, one way or another, for over 20 years. First as a performer, then moving into sound design and operation, Deb now spends most of her work time as a technical operator and stage manager. Deb is a passionate supporter of theatre in New Zealand, and in the last few years has been involved in a whirlwind of shows, including *Miss Brontë*, *Midsummer*, *RED*, *August: Osage County*, *When the Rain Stops Falling*, and touring shows *Meeting Karpovsky* and *Boomers Behaving Badly*. Deb also teaches the rudiments of lighting and running shows to students of Queen Margaret College and St Oran's College.

Marisa Cuzzolaro – Set and prop design, poster design

Working the arts for over a decade Marisa is a practiced artist. Originally from Brisbane where she established herself as a photographer, graphic designer and performer, Marisa now works with Melbourne Theatre Company which has inspired her to extend her visual and spacial skills into set design and props making. With a base in production and venue management and a passion for building and creating she has the capacity to cultivate imaginary worlds into spaces you can stand in. As side project she working on creating her own hand embroidered brooches and is studying a Masters in Arts and Cultural Management.

PERFORMANCE SPECIFICS

DURATION

Act 1 – 75 minutes

SUITABLE VENUES

The show is suitable for a small theatre (50-150 capacity) or historical homes with a large performance space.

MAXIMUM NUMBER OF PERFORMANCES PER WEEK

6 performances

MINIMUM BREAK BETWEEN PERFORMANCES

Only one performance per day

LICENCING AGREEMENTS

n/a

APRA OBLIGATIONS

n/a

TOURING PERSONNEL

The touring party consists of 3 people.

Name	Role
Mel Dodge	Actor
Lyndee-Jane Rutherford	Tour Manager
Deb McGuire	Operator/SM

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Year	Venue	Number of performances
2013	Ayers House Museum	5
2014	Circa Theatre	20

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

Miss Brontë lends itself to links with historical homes. This allows audiences access to a venue they may not usually attend. It also creates an opportunity to historical places to engage creatively with the public. We are also offering a workshop for writers, where the public are encouraged to create a piece of writing based on an historical figure. This is suitable for public, or senior secondary school pupils. It will allow them to spark creativity and learn new skills. This could also be linked to local libraries or writers groups. We would also like to offer post show discussions, which were very popular in New Zealand.

DESCRIPTION / DETAILS

Public attending our writing workshops will experience a fun, creative one hour workshop which allows them to create characters based on historical figures. They will work on a short monologue for their chosen character. We will need a hall or large room and the students will be asked to bring paper and pen. A maximum of 30 people per workshop.

COST

\$100 per workshop. This fee is on top of performance costs.

TARGET AUDIENCE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Senior high school students, writers groups, creative adults.

MARKETING

MARKETING COPY

One line

Charlotte Brontë has a secret...in fact secrets seem to run in the family.

Short

Charlotte Brontë has a secret. In fact secrets seem to run in the family...

How could an unmarried woman living in a secluded parsonage, with only her sisters for company, write one of the World's greatest love stories? She had tasted love and her secrets echo in the pages of Jane Eyre.

Directed by award winning Lyndee-Jane Rutherford. Written and performed by Mel Dodge using the letters and novels of Charlotte Brontë.

Miss Brontë tells a story of ambition, forbidden love and the bond of family.

Extended

Charlotte Brontë has a secret. In fact secrets seem to run in the family...

How could an unmarried woman living in a secluded parsonage, with only her sisters for company, write one of the World's greatest love stories? The Brontës are known for their passionate, wild creations, but their own secret addictions, ambitions and clandestine loves are less known.

Charlotte had fallen in love with her married French Professor. She wrote passionate letters to him which he tore into pieces. His wife surreptitiously found them and sewed them back together. They are now in The British Museum. All of her heroes and the plots for many of her novels are based on him. Charlotte had tasted love and her secrets echo in the pages of Jane Eyre.

Directed by award winning Lyndee-Jane Rutherford. Written and performed by Mel Dodge using the letters and novels of Charlotte Brontë.

Miss Brontë tells a story of ambition, forbidden love and the bond of family.

MARKETING SUMMARY

We have an effective, classical image of Charlotte which sells the play well. We partnered with the International Writers Festival in New Zealand and a Historical Home in Adelaide. This helped us to reach a larger market. We found that the name Brontë somewhat sells itself. Our target audience is women aged 18 to 80. Men came too, but mainly women.

MEDIA QUOTES

Powerful Performance, Skillfully Directed

By Laurie Atkinson, The Dominion Post, 24 February 2014

Though it opened on the first night of the Festival, *Miss Bronte* isn't part of it. However it could well be, for Mel Dodge's outstanding performance and Lyndee-Jane Rutherford's polished direction have produced something special with this solo play about Charlotte Bronte.

Charlotte takes the audience into her world of the tiny vicarage on the bleak Yorkshire Moors and to Brussels with Emily where they worked as teachers, and through the traumatic days with their alcoholic, laudanum addicted brother, Branwell, and his death, followed three months later by Emily's and then in the following year by Anne's.

Only Branwell didn't use writing as an escape from their cloistered lives, but his sisters threw all their desires, emotions and frustrations into poems and novels, often barely bothering to disguise the personal details.

In the play Charlotte tosses papers, letters and books (whose covers are also unobtrusive chronological guides for the audience) all over the floor in anger, frenzy, unrequited love, and comic emphasis throughout the play's 75 minutes.

Charlotte's letters, poems and novels, as well those of her sisters, and comments by her critics have been judiciously filleted and used to illuminate the events of their lives, and to expose Charlotte's heartbreaking emotional life, of which we are given a bitter-sweet and unusual coda as we leave the theatre.

But what comes across most strongly and very powerfully is the strength of character necessary to cope with, as Charlotte puts it, the dependency of single women.

Though most Victorians agreed with Poet Laureate Robert Southey, an admirer of Charlotte, when he wrote that "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be", she persevered with her writing all her life.

Mel Dodge's performance burns bright with this perseverance and stoicism as her eyes express her anger, sorrow and determination and makes the play so much more than a lesson in English Lit.

**Perceptive, Intelligent, Fiery, Romantic and Poignant
By John Smythe, Theatreview 24th Feb 2014**

Having declared [*Jane Austen is Dead*](#) in 2008 and again last year, Mel Dodge has now exhumed Charlotte Brontë for our theatrical pleasure. The text of her thoroughly researched and cleverly structured play, *Miss Brontë*, is 75 percent Brontë, the rest is imagined, and it's all brought together in her a richly layered solo performance, directed with flair by Lyndee-Jane Rutherford.

There were, of course three 'Miss Brontë' authors: Charlotte, Emily and Anne, born in that order in the first two decades of the 19th century. The play is named for the way Charlotte introduces themselves to their publisher, George Smith, in order to prove they are not their pseudonyms – Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell – let alone one and the same person, as some acerbic critic has asserted.

As we take our seats, a haunted looking, severely corseted and crinoline-clad Charlotte, buttoned up to the neck (costume design by Letty Macphedran), is writing in a tiny notebook. Also tiny are the framed pictures that adorn the off-white walls that stretch either side of a fireplace in the parsonage at Haworth (on the West Yorkshire moors), where every surface is covered with papers and books (set design by Marisa Cuzzolaro).

This sense of smallness and isolation proves a dramatic counterpoint to the liberation she and her sisters achieve through their writing. The play opens with Charlotte recalling the challenge she sets herself to write a heroine "as small and plain as myself" who will be as interesting as the beautiful women of their stories – thus: *Jane Eyre*.

Amid its treasure trove of insights into the Brontës' lives and times, *Miss Brontë* goes on to contrast the romance of the intense and finally fulfilled love the governess Jane Eyre held for her employer Mr Rochester, with the doomed reality of Charlotte's secret love for her Belgian teacher Constantin Héger. With his wife, Héger ran a school in Brussels which the sisters attended in 1842. He invited Charlotte back to teach English and became her pupil himself.

Charlotte's older sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, both died of tuberculosis in childhood, having suffered from hunger and cold at the school she used as a model for Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. She also lost Anne, Emily and their brother Branwell to consumption; their passings poignantly illustrated using a set of toy soldiers. (Their mother had died soon after Anne was born. Their father, an Anglican curate, and poet, writer and polemicist, was rarely home, it seems, and would outlive them all, after Charlotte's death at 38.)

Little wonder, then, that Charlotte is suffering writer's block (not that she calls it that). It seems, despite our regular excursions into *Jane Eyre*, robustly rendered by Ms Dodge, and the constantly intriguing revelations about the sisters' lives and literary

careers, peppered with strong social commentary and including a surprising letter to Charlotte from William Makepeace Thackeray, we are destined to descend into a dark and lonely pit of despair. But no.

The late discovery of an unopened letter sets Charlotte on a lively quest to find a lost manuscript. Physical chaos ensues and the dramatic denouement is simultaneously triumphant, tragic and riddled with moral dilemma. But Charlotte lives on to envision, and begin, her next novel, *Villette*, in which her beloved Héger will live on.

In the face of published criticism of her for not being feminine enough as a woman writer, Mel Dodge gives Charlotte an impassioned outburst. Those who are inspired, as many must be after seeing this play, to delve further into the life and work of Charlotte Brontë and read *Villette* – named for the fictitious town 'abroad', where Lucy Snowe goes to teach in a boarding school – will further relish its exploration of isolation, the repression of individual desire by 'society' and the triumph of her strength of will in achieving independence and fulfilment.

Perceptive, intelligent, fiery, romantic, poignant and packed into a potent 75 minutes, *Miss Brontë* deserves to grace stages at festivals around the world. If you're in Wellington, don't miss this chance to discover her story and stories

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

Lyndee-Jane has directed a sublime piece of theatre. I wept, I laughed and I was totally carried away by this theatrical tour de force. For me, Mel Dodge IS Charlotte Bronte, from all I've ever read of her works, and also from the many works I've read about her since I was very young. What a magnificent performance. I want everyone to see this beautifully written and performed play. Just cannot say enough about it. WOW.

~ Felicity Cozens

Yet another absolutely superb one-hander. Incredible empathy with her character and family.

~ Dawn Sanders, Shakespeare Globe Centre New Zealand

Thank you so much for Miss Bronte. We saw it on Friday night and I ran sobbing from the theatre. Wonderful, powerful - the very best theatre experience. Thank you for taking me to Haworth Parsonage. Lyndee -Jane and Mel - take this show to the world. But first take it to Nelson and Christchurch. All my family want to see it. Denise Cadigan

Saw this show last Sunday and as a Bronte fan I found it very moving. Thank you Mel Dodge and Lyndee-Jane Rutherford.

~ Jac Bolam

Snuck out of NZ Festival-ness tonight to see Mel Dodge channel Charlotte Bronte at Circa Theatre – lovely courageous performance.

~Sarah Chandler, NZ Festival Publicist

COLLEAGUE RECOMMENDATIONS

A powerful show.

-Hilary Norris

Miss Brontë is fantastic and Mel Dodge is mesmerizing. GO SEE IT!!!

~Cara Hill, Circa Theatre Publicist

VIDEO LINKS

A trailer and full length version of the play will be available shortly.

IMAGES



Charlotte with her sister's writing.

Photo by Massive Pics



Charlotte drawing.
Photo by Massive Pics
More photos available on request.

MARKETING MATERIALS

Fliers and posters are available –please see example eflyer on the following page- and we have a designer who is able to update details for future tours.

CONTENT WARNINGS / AUDIENCES TO AVOID

No, although not suitable for children under 12.

SPONSOR OR OTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Not at present.

TEACHER'S RESOURCES

Yes. There are resources for teachers available linking the show to literacy curriculum.

Brave Theatre presents

MISS BRONTË

Directed by Lyndee Jane Rutherford
Performed by Mel Dodge

[f/BraveTheatre](#) [@BraveTheatre](#)

*Charlotte Brontë has a secret.
In fact secrets seem to run in the family...*

Directed by award winning Lyndee-Jane Rutherford.
Written by Mel Dodge, using the letters and novels
of Charlotte Brontë, along with the many biographical
works about her life. Miss Brontë tells a story of
ambition, forbidden love and the bond of family.

How could an unmarried woman living in a secluded
parsonage, with only her sisters for company, write
one of the world's greatest love stories?

She had tasted love and her secrets echo
in the pages of Jane Eyre.

Proudly supported by Peter Biggs CNZM and Mary Biggs

21 FEB – 15 MAR

TUES TO SAT 7.30pm

SUN 4.30pm

ADULTS \$39

CONCESSIONS & FRIENDS \$33

UNDER 25s \$25

** 23 FEB SPECIAL PRICE \$25

**25 FEB POST-SHOW FORUM



BOOKINGS
1 TARANAKI ST
801 7992
www.circa.co.nz

**CIRCA
THEATRE**

encore

BAR | RESTAURANT | CAFE

Contemporary cuisine - a fresh approach to waterfront dining

Reservations 801 7996

Restaurant: Tuesday-Sunday

www.encoreatcirca.co.nz

CHAPMAN
TRIPP

Deloitte.

vodafone

creative
22

PROPERTY
MANAGEMENT

RADIO LIVE
WELLINGTON 98.7FM

PRODUCTION DETAILS

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

In a theatre space we require a simple lighting rig with separation of front, back and left, right of stage possible. We need a sound system which can be connected to a laptop.

In an historical home we only need a sound system which can be connected to a laptop.

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE

Bump	6 hrs
Cue to cue	1 hr
Tech rehearsal	2 hrs

In an historical home we would only need 4 hrs for bump in.

CREW REQUIRED FROM VENUE

One house tech with knowledge of the lighting board and sound equipment to cover bump in and tech.

STAGE

We are flexible with stage sizes and are able to adapt our set to different spaces. An intimate setting is preferred, but not essential. We have three tables, six chairs, a fireplace and between 1 and 7 flats depending on the needs of the space.

BRAVE Theatre to supply

We will supply all set elements.

Venue to supply

If the venue is able to supply era (1850s) chairs and tables that would be wonderful, but not essential.

LIGHTING

Our lighting is fairly simple and we are able to work to an existing rig.

BRAVE Theatre to supply

Specials as needed.

Venue to supply

Standard lighting rig.

SOUND

Sound and music are large components of the play. We need a good sound system which is able to be linked to a laptop.

BRAVE Theatre to supply

Lap top.

Venue to supply

Sound system with good speakers.

AV

N/A

WARDROBE

We have one beautiful costume with a crinoline and corset which will need to be hung up each night.

BRAVE Theatre to supply
Costume.

Venue to supply

We will need access to one dressing room and a tub for handwashing.

FREIGHT NOTES

We will have a small truck so would need to be able to park nearby for bump in and bump out.

CRITICAL ISSUES

It is useful to be able to have a full black out, but in historical homes that is not necessary.

CONTACTS

Producer/Actor/Writer/Tour Manager

Mel Dodge meldodge@gmail.com 0406809985

Director/Dramaturg/Tour Manager

Lyndee-Jane Rutherford lyndeejane@xtra.co.nz

Set Design

Marisa Cuzzolaro marisacuz@gmail.com

Operator/SM

Deb McGuire debmcguire25@gmail.com

Publicity

Debbie Fish (TBC) Debbie.fish@hotmail.com

Lighting Design

Glenn Ashworth glenn.ashworth@gmail.com