

# Kirkos

## ***Beginner's Guide to Slow Travel***

Friday 25th October 2024, 8pm

King's Pavilion, University of Aberdeen

co-commissioned by hcmf//, New Music Dublin and **sound**  
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**Kirkos:** Sebastian Adams, Robert Coleman, Yseult Cooper Stockdale, Jane Hackett, Hannah Miller, Joan Somers Donnelly.

### **Programme notes**

*'When the logic of capitalist productivity threatens both endangered life and endangered ideas, I see little difference between habitat restoration in the traditional sense and restoring habitats for human thought.'* (Jenny Odell, How To Do Nothing)

#### **Joan:**

*'The idea of making a piece about climate initially felt daunting. Should we be making some kind of grand statement in the work? But who are we to be making a grand statement? We are just six people, trying to be engaged with the world and other people in it, within and outside of our practices, no more experts on any of it than the next person.'*

*A practical consideration that came up early on was that several of us had limitations in terms of how much or how long we could rehearse for, because of various health conditions which had already proved to be barriers in taking on certain other projects. The more we talked about it, the more related this felt to the piece. If we want to significantly reduce our emissions and other harmful environmental impacts as a society it will mean more than a few adjustments. It will mean changing how we live. We asked ourselves, what does it look like to slow down as an independent artist without income security? And so that became a part of the experiment. We took naps together as a group in rehearsals, rather than continuing to rehearse when some of us needed to nap. We did improvisations that started when we woke up from those naps. We read to each other. We went on walks, improvising with creatures we met en route. We guided meditations*

*and physical warm-ups for each other and sent each other voice messages from walks in between rehearsals.*

*Rather than attempting to make some kind of statement, the piece emerged from this process of considering different ways to think about and (re)do our relationships with other people, with creative work, with other creatures, and with the landscapes around us, whether through creating travelling pirate radio stations, generating sound for plants through light energy, singing for cows, recording changing soundscapes in the natural environment on this island, resting on each others bodies and instruments between playing during improvisations. Our rehearsal room has felt like a habitat for thinking together. Not just through words but through sound, movement, contact and stillness. Thinking but also resting, mourning, celebrating and imagining.*

*As six independent artists, scheduling the time to create and rehearse the piece was a balancing act. I remember one day early on in the process the conversation got a bit tense, because we were struggling to find enough rehearsal days in the lead up to the premiere. The suggested days would mean that one of us wouldn't have any days off to rest between this and another project. Someone said that, even if it wasn't ideal, it was our "only option." But then we realised, and agreed, that not exhausting ourselves also had to be an option.*

*Part of why I wanted to be an artist was the idea that, in art, there are rules, but you can break them and make your own rules, and that's also kind of part of it. I liked the idea of making and testing new rules or conditions for being in the world and interacting with each other, under the guise of performance. As I see it, we made the piece, and the process of making it, a kind of micro-habitat for living and working differently. And like taking the Eurostar and Sail Rail and to travel from France and Belgium to Ireland for rehearsals, what begins as some kind of symbolic statement or artistic gesture neither practical nor normal when you first do it, once you start in-habiting it, can become just that; a habit for living in, too'.*

### **Jane:**

*'My journey with slow travel started during a time when my body became heavy, my legs could no longer carry me from one place to the next and I was faced with the realisation that my life would not look the same again. The virus hit hard and for the majority of a year, my life consisted of bed, hospitals and sleep. I was diagnosed with FND (functional neurological disorder) after having an attack of a bad virus in 2022. This is a relatively unknown disorder but one that has increased in diagnosis since the covid 19 pandemic, many of its symptoms similar to those of ME, CFS and long covid. I spent months trying to comprehend what was going on and how slow my world had become. My body had to relearn how to walk, talk and do simple daily tasks which most days exceeded more energy than I had to give. Along this on-going journey, I found moments of peace, away from the hustle and bustle of today's fast paced existence, it was almost a welcome to not have energy to think or exist as I had done before. My body needed sleep and lots of it. In fact, it still does.*

*During my recovery, Kirkos was undertaking a new work focusing on slow travel. It seemed ironic that up until the virus, (I'm ashamed to say) I had no experience of slow travelling, and during the following year I did nothing but travel slowly. Although it was forced upon me due to my health, it seems so fitting that this piece comes at this time with this group. I was apprehensive delving into a new work, my first since being ill and knew I would have to navigate my energy level in rehearsals with five other people. This work would involve travelling to other countries and performing- all of which I had not done in some time. A little aside- I remember, being brought into town one day- my auntie and I went into Bewleys cafe on Grafton street. We sat at the window and had cake for a*

while and then walked a little way to her car. I'll never forget the swarm of fast paced people walking through the streets around me. It honestly seemed like everyone was on ecstasy and were being forced to move faster than their legs wanted. Or maybe I was just moving very slowly. In reality it was most likely a bit of both. But who knows anymore? At the beginning of the Kirkos rehearsal period, I was severely lacking in energy and had to frequently take breaks. I would bring a yoga mat to every rehearsal (something I still do) and lie down during rehearsals whenever I needed. Sometimes I found it very difficult to get back up and I would have to leave rehearsal early or just lie and listen to what I could. There are several of us in the group who suffer from conditions and so we began to adopt necessary moments of rest throughout the rehearsal period. In a strange way it became a connecting experience without the need for any musical or spoken intervention... a few moments of lying down, resting or sleeping (some of us drifted into a deep sleep with snoring on occasion!) and it felt right to honour those moments which are so rarely collective as we grow older.

As people, with busy lives, living in a world where slowing down seems irrelevant and weak, this very thing became a strong underlying element of our piece. We had many discussions about rest and its power as a catalyst for change, undertook group exercises using the voice and body and went on site visits to the port and green areas around Unit 44. Each of us brought an element to the piece which we felt connected to- topics including grief, technology, energy, breath, cows, oppression, collectiveness. We embodied worms and sang to cows. It all seems quite hectic when I write it down but somehow we managed this in a slow and thoughtful way, giving space to everyone's needs. That's not to say we were one harmonious unit from the beginning, agreeing on everything - far from it - there were many moments of angst and tension, heated discussion and brutal honesty.

In November, we made our first journey as a group to Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. Working with an occupational therapist I was aware how important planning the journey and rest periods would be for my health. The slow travel journey began at 7am at the Dublin Ferry Port. Sadly I had never got the ferry from Dublin port before this journey, but was surprised at the quietness and sparsity of foot passengers about. After being driven to the port, we showed our tickets, passports, left our cases in and boarded the ferry, all with relative ease. My mind couldn't help comparing the experience to a bustling Dublin airport. I felt calm here. I had flown since the virus but always with wheelchair assistance to get me through.

Up until a little while before the journey to Huddersfield I didn't know whether I would travel by plane out of necessity or travel with the rest of the group via ferry (the latter being my obvious preferred choice and the one I ended up doing). The relative normalisation of people sleeping on the ferry was nice to see and I thought to myself aah I might fit in here! The ease of movement felt freeing. It felt like there was oodles of time to do nothing, having no phone signal, just bobbing in the water. There were lots of pockets of space and time for people to engage in little bits of conversations, an exchange of a few words. A collective gathering of people all moving slowly. It felt good. Sebastian had booked me a single cabin so I slept for the majority of the ferry journey.

On arrival, a bus brought us to the train station and after some mixing up of trains we ran to the correct train going to Manchester. I couldn't run and as all my fellow colleagues bolted around the corner, it's in moments like that that exaggerated the dragging slowness of my slow travel experience... a submission to the slowness, a thought that the train might go without you and that's ok. When there's no other choice but to walk slowly for a train that you really need to get on as quickly as possible... it's a funny paradox. Over the period of working on this piece with Kirkos, I have noticed my energy increasing and my endeavours at slow travel becoming part of my routine- already this year I have

*slow travelled with the train through Switzerland, Belgium, France and the UK for trips (sometimes battling with bus drivers to make sure my violin gets on to the bus with me). I have become aware of the access that could be improved upon on trains and ferries.*

*Many moments have occurred over the past two years which demand and twist and pull the need for speed, to keep hustling, to run for the train. At times a struggle and at others a welcome relief from the binds of society's enforced obligations. Knowing and owning my own limitations has given me permission to forge my own way which hopefully will help others forge theirs.'*

## Biography

**Kirkos** is a new music group from Dublin, Ireland, as well as the operator of Unit 44 - a DIY venue in Stoneybatter with a radically open approach to programming. We focus on trying to develop the ecosystem that thrives at the fringes of Irish new music and high-concept performances. Threading the line between experimental music and contemporary classical music, we rarely do straightforward concerts, preferring to incorporate every part of the audience's experience into our thinking about music. Work devised collaboratively and influences from theatre, visual art and performance art are a big part of what we do. Unit 44 is part of a DIY movement making up for the appalling lack of affordable cultural space available in our city. Booking open to artists from all genres and backgrounds, and we try to give the space away for free wherever possible. Since 2012, Kirkos have given 200 premieres, encompassing most of Ireland's leading composers. As a young ensemble, we are most proud of our work with newly emerging composers, and has given many Irish composers their first performances and commissions.

*This year's **sound** festival is dedicated to the memory of cellist Rohan de Saram, one of our patrons, who took part in many festivals. His musicianship, kindness and generosity will be much missed.*

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**sound** is a new music incubator based in north-east Scotland encouraging new music creation and discovery. We run the annual **sound** festival, as well as year-round activity supporting a wide range of composers, engaging with local communities and providing educational opportunities

Find out more: [www.sound-scotland.co.uk](http://www.sound-scotland.co.uk)

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