

CO-CREATED BY LOUISE OLIVER AND SHILPA T. HYLAND
PRODUCED BY STORIES UNTOLD PRODUCTIONS



"Double, Bubble, War and Rubble,
When you mess with women, you'll be in trouble.
We're convicted of murder if abortion is planned.
Convicted of shame if we don't have a man,
Convicted of conspiracy if we fight for our rights.
And burned at the stake when we stand up to fight."

Conspiracy Against Women Chant - W.I.T.C.H 1969

Synopsis

On Halloween 1968, Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (W.I.T.C.H.) was founded by a group of second wave feminists in New York. Reclaiming the persecuted symbol of the witch as a new symbol of solidarity they blazed brightly and briefly, getting some things wrong and some things right, not least hexing the stock exchange down a few points!

Scotland, 2023: a group of women are trying to figure out their place in the world and if they can possibly stop it from being so overwhelmingly terrible. When a half hearted summoning fails to help matters, they hit the town for a night out but something is stirring in the shadows, and who's that 17th century woman behind the bar? The WITCHes of the past are answering the call and they're not coming quietly.

Co-created by Louise Oliver and Shilpa T-Hyland, W.I.T.C.H uses the symbol of the witch and all the women of the past, charged with being troublesome, to ask what we do now? It's part protest rally, part gig-theatre, part Witches Sabbath and all one wild night out in Glasgow.

Context

It's been over 50 years since the original W.I.T.C.H protest movement descended on the financial heartland of the United States, intent on hexing the patriarchy - anonymously costumed, complete with brooms, capes and pointy black hats, chanting "Wall Street, Wall Street, up against the Wall Street". The political symbol of the Witch and everything she represents remains as potent in 2023 as it ever was. She is the connective tissue between fear, feminism and fighting back. Today she looms as large as she ever did within popular culture, as something women and girls actively identify with, transcending her original purpose as a patriarchal tool for oppression, to become a powerful unifying figurehead for resistance. The privileged but well intentioned women of the 60s W.I.T.C.H movement understood this, even if their approach was a bit messy.

They broke away to expand the reach of their protest. W.I.T.C.H was an acronym, to be deployed to suit the cause (Women Intent on Tearing down Capitalist Hierarchy or Welcoming Immigrants and Their Children Here). Members of W.I.T.C.H wanted to represent more than just the fight for women's rights; they wanted to support the anti-war movement, students' rights, black liberation and fight back against a capitalist and patriarchal system. The group would always be anonymous but theatrical; guerrilla theatre, improvised songs and chants, and a belief in the aesthetics of resistance, were the weapons of choice. They struck a chord of fear and unease, but behind the costumes they were normal people fighting for what they believed was right.

"We are everywhere. We are your sisters, your neighbours, your teachers, your bartenders, your mechanics, your check-out clerks, your drivers, and your nurses. If you are a woman, and you dare to look within yourself, you are a Witch".

~ **stated as part of the original 1970s W.I.T.C.H manifesto.**



Our Approach

W.I.T.C.H is a raucous piece of theatre about the power invoked when women gather and find strength in each other. W.I.T.C.H the play is the culmination of four years of research, creative exploration and personal and political growth.

The show explores the Witch as a mythical and political figure. It delves into her shared history with matriarchs and healers, sexually liberated women, with revolutionary politics and her contemporary resurgence in popular culture.

All of this will be presented within a modern Scottish context - incorporating contemporary themes and politics alongside Scotland's own turbulent history with "the witch". The show will be site-responsive, performed in non-traditional spaces, and incorporate local history.

The goal with W.I.T.C.H is to create a politically charged yet satirical, and ultimately very fun, performance of resistance. The form of the story involves two sets of characters existing in the same space; the "ancestors" who use music and direct address - essentially inviting the audience into their witches sabbath to engage with their stories of rebellious women throughout history, and a group of present day Scottish women on their own journeys of political and personal self-discovery. We want to keep the audience on their toes; funny and grounded intersecting with magical realism.

Previous Development

Following an ideas workshop at the National Theatre of Scotland, the project received some seed money from the **RCS' Make it Happen** fund to support a two-day long residency on the Isle of Skye. This time was used to research

folkloric interpretations of witches and interrogate and respond to the original 1970s W.I.T.C.H. manifesto and connect with the Witch inside of us. This provided us a starting point from which to delve into the history of the “witch”, how the word witch, from ancient times to modern day, within myth and contemporary political discourse, has been weaponized but also reclaimed.

In October 2019 we completed a week-long residency at Lyth Arts Centre.

This time was used to focus on narrative and character development, getting specific about our message and themes, to test out some original music and some early script ideas. During this residency we hosted our first “Spells and Protest” workshop with some women from the Wick community – which was extremely well received. The residency concluded with W.I.T.C.H. receiving its first public sharing.

“The sharing was great and we’d love to do more of these, you have inspired us! It was better than some finished shows we have. The music was charming but atmospheric when it needed to be. The writing style was warm, poetical and really powerful in places – particularly including the names of the Caithness folk who had been killed for accusations of witchcraft”.

Charlotte Mountford, Co-Artistic Director of Lyth Arts Centre

The next phase for W.I.T.C.H. was to get the show to a skeleton version of its final form, with Pitlochry Festival Theatre, for a week in May 2020, as part of their Supported Artist initiative. Unfortunately COVID meant that this opportunity didn't materialise.



"As women, our past has been taken from us. Our present is confused and our future uncertain".

Robin Morgan, founding member of the 1969 W.I.T.C.H. Movement

"The witch was in reality the profoundest thinker, the most advanced scientist of those ages...."

**Matilda Joslyn Gage, in her speech at the Women's Rights Convention, held at
Syracuse,(Sept. 1852)**

Creative Team



Louise Oliver (Co-Creator / Writer)

Louise is an actor, writer and producer from Scotland. She got her Masters Degree in Theatre Studies from the University of Glasgow and also trained as an actor at the [New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts](#). She is the co-founder of [Persistent and Nasty](#) - a podcast series and advocacy initiative for women working in arts, culture and media. As a theatre writer she's had her work staged and / or developed with the Tron Theatre, The Arches, Glasgay! Festival, Lyth Arts Centre, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and presented at the Edinburgh Fringe.

As an actor, her resume is varied; from appearing in TVs Outlander, gender flipping Shakespeare, to making immersive, activist, queer theatre that tours around Scotland.

At the beginning of 2021, Louise was thrilled to be selected as one of 12 Short Circuit Convergence Screenwriters - a BFI and Screen Scotland development programme for creatives from other disciplines interested in transitioning into writing for the screen, and in 2022 was selected by the Edinburgh International Film Festival's talent development arm to be one of their Script Starter screenwriters. Louise's screen practice is going from strength to strength and she has a couple of exciting things in development.

As a producer, she works in a freelance capacity with Edinburgh based company Civil Disobedience, is the Performance Producer for OneRen Arts and Culture and is producing the [Paisley Book Festival](#) for the fourth year in a row. Louise also acts as the Scotland liaison and Associate Producer for NYC based arts organisation [Ghostlight Global](#), who work in partnership with Playbill and have some game changing plans for the Edinburgh Fringe in 2023.

Shilpa T. Hyland (Co-Creator / Director)



Shilpa T-Hyland is a Glasgow based theatre director. She trained at the Royal Conservatoire Scotland.

Directing credits include: The Prognostications of *Mikey Noyce* (Play, Pie, Pint), *Kissing Linford Christie* (Catherine Wheels, co-director), *Oscar* (Play, Pie, Pint), *Revolution Days* (Bijli), *We'll Meet in Moscow* (Traverse Theatre), *Roxana* (Paisley Book Festival/Renfrewshire Leisure), *How to Disappear Completely and Never be Found* (Royal Conservatoire Scotland), *Listen to Me a Scenes for Survival* (National Theatre Scotland), *Miss Julie* (Horsecross) as the inaugural winner of the Horsecross Trust Young Director Award, *The Dragon and the Whales* (Modest Predicament), *Atlas* (Modest Predicament), *Bubble* (Royal Conservatoire Scotland), and *Erin, Errol and The Earth Creatures* (Modest Predicament).

Associate Directing includes: *Burn* (National Theatre Scotland), *Still* (Traverse Theatre), *Pride and Prejudice* (Sort Of) (Blood of the Young, The Lyceum Theatre & others), and *The 306: Dusk* (NTS, Horsecross). Assistant directing: *Crocodile Fever* (Traverse Theatre, JMK regional bursary, funded by the Leverhulme Trust Arts Scholarships Fund), and *The 306: Day* (NTS, Horsecross).

Shilpa is an Associate Artist (Director) at the Traverse Theatre, a board trustee for Tortoise in a Nutshell, and a PhD candidate at the Royal Conservatoire Scotland.



Robyn Jancovich Brown (Producer)

Robyn is an independent producer and arts project manager based in Scotland, specialising in participatory, contemporary and community arts projects. Since 2009 she has worked with a number of Scotland's leading arts festivals, cultural organisations and theatre companies including; British Council, Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, Imagine, National Theatre of Scotland, Starcatchers and Dumfries & Galloway Dance.

Robyn has been involved in the management and strategic development of programmes such as; the Made in Scotland Showcase, Momentum, British Council & Creative Scotland International partnership and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society's artist development and international engagement work through the Arts Industry Office.

Robyn's ambition is to craft creative experiences which bring people together and create shared and meaningful moments. She has a keen interest in work which promotes equality, inclusion and well-being in society and which makes space for the voices and stories which are often left unheard. Having worked on high profile international projects Robyn has significant relationships across the globe and is interested in exploring how these two facets of her practice can come together.

As well as running [Stories Untold Productions](#), Robyn is currently also; Producer with [Civic Digits](#), exploring how digital technology and live performance can be integrated to inspire a new and diverse generation of tech experts, and a freelance project producer with [Stellar Quines](#).

E: robyn@storiesuntoldproductions.com

