



## **THE UNKNOWN LAND** by Caroline Small

### **The Theme**

Sublime and overwhelming beauty and grandeur - but yet treacherous sea ice, collapsing cliffs as high as cathedrals, ghostly whale shoals beneath the keel, the eerie ringing whale music.

What dreams and experiences must have been unarticulated by the men who visited these coasts, that could not have been put in official reports?

In Lancaster Sound in 1857, a whaling ship, the Cambrian, came upon a 57-foot whale asleep. She awoke as they approached, swam round the ship, and then pushed it backwards for two minutes before being harpooned. Incidents like this made arctic whale men uneasy. Was this an eerie warning of doom? Was she urging them to go back before the ice laid claim to them?

When Parry set out from Deptford in 1820 the North American arctic was still an unknown land. A landscape of numinous events, of a darkness so dunning it precipitated madness, of a cold that froze vinegar and fractured whatever it penetrated. Europeans had perished there since the time of the Norse – gangrenous with frostbite, poisoned by polar bear liver, rotted by scurvy, dead of exposure on the ice next to the wreck of a ship, burned to the waterline for its last bit of warmth.

### **The Story**

The year is 1844. A man answers a newspaper advertisement inviting him to apply to join a ship bound for arctic waters, to explore the unknown wastes north of Greenland. What draws him on to undertake this journey? Is there something in his past life that pushes him to leave home and travel to this unknown, inhospitable place?

This is a story of adventure on the arctic ice, the search for the Northwest Passage, of man's heroic struggle against alien conditions – and his mental struggle with his own past.

The play will weave together many stories – like that of Sir John Franklin who in 1845 commanded an expedition to find the Northwest Passage. He was beleaguered by thick ice for two years and died in 1847. His entire crew died of scurvy and starvation on the long walk to safety. It is said that Franklin ate his boots before he died.

### **The Show**

This show is currently in development. It will be available in summer 2009. It will be a piece for an actor and a musician - about an hour and a half in length. It will be

portable and flexible, fitting into a variety theatres, arts centres and smaller venues. It will be suitable for adults and children over 12 years old.

### **The Writer**

Caroline Small is a playwright, director, performer and storyteller. She writes scripts for children's theatre and youth theatre, for adult audiences and for audio drama. Her plays for Cotton Grass Theatre include *Into the Rose Garden*, *The Hollow Country*, *Black Bread and Tired Feet* and *Gardens of Delight*. Recent projects include *Cabbage and Custard*, an audio drama for children, and *Travels with a Broken Heart*, a collaboration with singer Carol Bowns and pianist Heidi Rolfe. Caroline is also an experienced workshop leader, specialising in participatory theatre making and creative writing with people of all ages in education and community settings.

### **The Company**

After a serious mid-life crisis **David Frederickson** trained as an actor at the Bristol Old Vic. He has appeared with the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Birmingham Rep, the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Manchester Royal Exchange, Southwold Summer Theatre and in 2005 made his West End debut in Nigel Planer's *On The Ceiling* at the Garrick Theatre. Most recently, he played Polonius in *Hamlet* for Demi-Paradise Productions at Lancaster Castle. His TV appearances include *Dangerfield*, *Heartbeat*, *The Braithwaites*, *Emmerdale*, *The Cops* and *The Royal Today*.

**Keith Kendrick** is a professional folksinger who has been at it for four decades and has been a full-time solo performer since 1990. He is Derbyshire born and bred and still lives in Ashbourne. He specialises in the authentic performance of traditional songs and ballads of both land and sea and the playing and tutoring of two varieties of the English Concertina. He has played with most of the greats of the modern English folk revival. His most recent CD is entitled: *Songs from the Derbyshire Coast*.

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