



**University of Brighton**

**BILLY COWIE**

**SHAKESPEARE NEEDS YOU**

Choreography exploring the boundaries between  
theatre, literature and dance performance

# RESEARCH OUTPUT



*Shakespeare Needs You*  
Still from recorded extract  
Seoul 2016

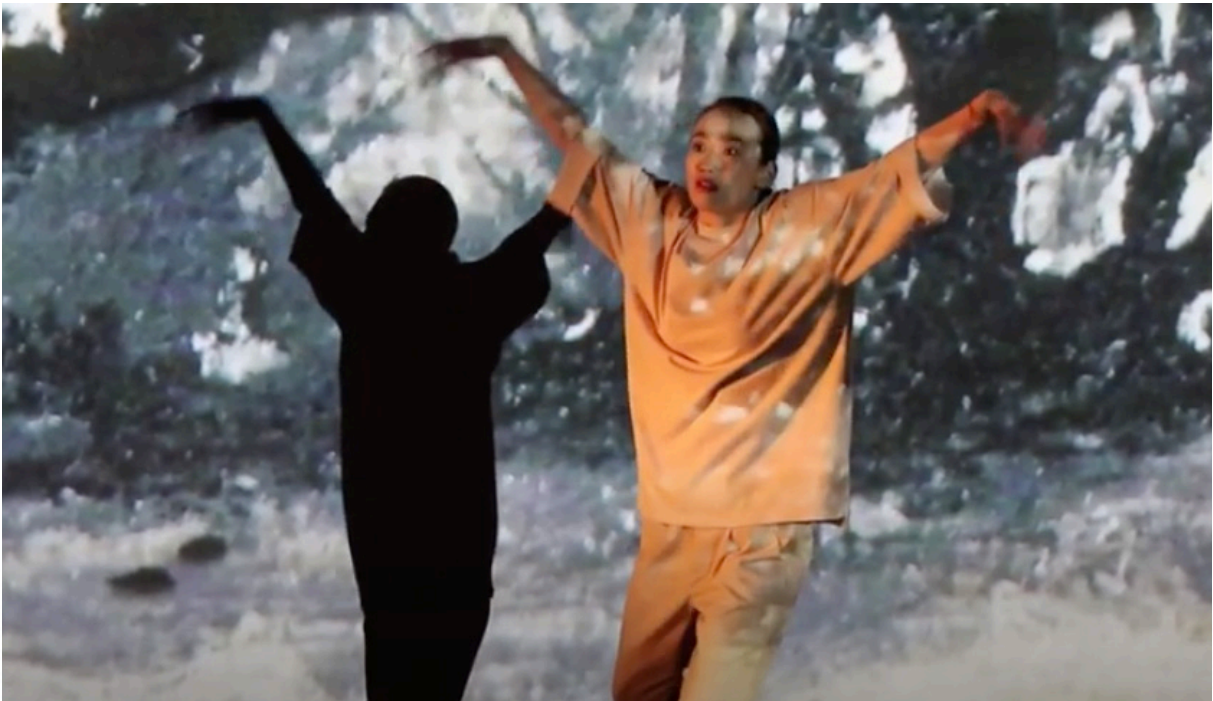
***Shakespeare Needs You* (셰익스피어 니즈유) was a 40-minute ballet commissioned by Festival B:om and fORbYaRTS in Seoul, Korea in 2016 with support from the British Council as part of its Shakespeare Lives campaign.**

Cowie used the commission to extend his research into the complex borderland between dance and related art forms. In *Shakespeare Needs You*, he constructs a dance performance that responds to the traditions of theatrical performance and literary performance texts. Based on the work and mediated persona of Shakespeare, it was produced during the 400-year anniversary of his death and focuses on *The Tempest* (1611) for textual and thematic material.

The work reunited Cowie with his regular artist collaborator, Silke Mansholt to produce a projected backdrop in front of which dancers Ruri Han and Myung Hoon Park performed, with Korean film star Kim C appearing on video as Shakespeare.

In 2019, two sections from the work ('The Isle is Full of Noises' and 'Full Fathom Five') were presented as solo looping installations by dancer Laura Rios at the Havana Biennial in Cuba.

# Shakespeare Needs You



*Shakespeare Needs You*  
Stills from recorded extract  
Seoul 2016



# Shakespeare Needs You



**'Shakespeare's Entrance' excerpt from *Shakespeare Needs You***

Dancers Ruri Han, Myung Hoon Park with actor Kim C

Created and choreographed by Billy Cowie

Access recording of performance at

<https://www.youtube.com/Q8uduZsd6DI>



**'The Isle is Full of Noises' excerpt from *Shakespeare Needs You***

Dancer, Ruri Han; Shakespeare, Kim C; singer, Rowan Godel

Created and choreographed by Billy Cowie

Visual design by Silke Manhsolt

Access recording of performance at

<https://www.youtube.com/XUOErx3q8oY>



# Shakespeare Needs You



**'Full Fathom Five' excerpt from *Shakespeare Needs You***

Dancers Ruri Han, Myung Hoon Park

Created and choreographed by Billy Cowie

Visual design by Silke Manhsolt

Access recording of performance at

<https://www.youtube.com/O3fbRSIDQLs>



**'Shakespeare Asleep' excerpt from *Shakespeare Needs You***

Dancers Ruri Han, Myung Hoon Park with actor Kim C

Created and choreographed by Billy Cowie

Access recording of performance at

<https://www.youtube.com/8Otz-uYZ4Lo>

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS



*Shakespeare Needs You*  
Still from recorded extract  
Seoul 2016

Cowie's research interrogates the form of dance, stretching its possibilities through the interplay with diverse influences from other performance methods and cultures. In *Shakespeare Needs You*, the investigation places the dynamics of traditional theatre in contrast with those of dance, questioning where the traditions might conjoin and what the limits might be.

The dance work prompts questions as to the role and status of literary play texts, how icon playwrights are performed and portrayed and how dance can disrupt audience expectations and understanding of the theatrical traditions. To examine these ideas, Cowie builds a complex work interlayed with live performance, recorded performance and projected artwork.

Two questions informed the technical and artistic development:

1. To what extent can live dance and film interact in bringing a new experience to dance performance audiences?
2. In what ways can literature be integrated into dance and what new meanings are generated in each?



# RESEARCH CONTEXT



## Shakespeare Needs You Festival B:om Poster

Extending the work into the iconography of the First World War poster and quotation reinforces the ways in which the dancework crosses into and draws upon wider cultural reference

Shakespeare's plays have long been produced as dance, especially as ballet, for example Prokofiev's ballet based on *Romeo and Juliet* which has been staged on many occasions by numerous choreographers.

However, most choreographers prefer not to use text in the work, perhaps seeing it as a distraction from the dance. The plays are therefore brought away from the poetic, linguistic and literary context, reduced to an alternative, specifically danced series of storytelling set pieces.

Deborah Levy (2006) recognises the many possibilities of combining text and dance. By strengthening the presence of the poet playwright, the playscript and the actorly performance, Cowie extended this range of possibilities, building upon dancework that had experimented with theatrical text, for example Ben Duke's *Paradise Lost Lies Unopened Beside Me* (2015).

The work was commissioned as part of the British Council Shakespeare Lives 2016 programme, a worldwide series of commissions and events involving new works inspired by Shakespeare to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of his death. The commission allowed a dancework to appear in a context that was largely literary and to offer a playful slant on the celebrated playwright.

The commission from Festival B:om was for a piece to accompany Cowie's earlier work, 'Art of Movement', a work with two dancers, normally from the country where the performances happen, performing with virtual projected 3D dancers. Along with the two Korean dancers in the new piece, Cowie sought to include a well-known film star to develop the themes of acting and the iconography of drama. Kim C, a popular Korean actor, was approached and accepted the role of Shakespeare. His depiction of Shakespeare as 'Big Head', a rather arrogant figure who is mocked by the dancers, is a light-hearted acknowledgement of cultural colonialism.

Cowie builds on a rich tradition of performance and adaptation of Shakespeare in Korea (Lee, 2015). *The Tempest*, for example was reimagined by Korean playwright Tae-Suk Oh and transported to fifth century Korea (Oh, 2011). Cowie's choreography meanwhile references the shamanistic traditions of Korean traditional dance (Cawley, 2019).



# RESEARCH PROCESS

**Cowie aimed to produce a new kind of dancework, one in which a multilayered set of references would expose the boundaries between what is understood through language and what is understood through movement.**

By combining segments of Shakespeare's text with movement and music, Cowie developed a work with distinct emotional impact. The multiplicity of references to performance and literature allowed a set of questions to develop as to the relationship between the diverse forms.

Cowie's inventive choreography and technical experiment used, for example: Korean translations of Shakespeare (translated by Kyungmin Lee), consciously referencing the playwright's iconic status alongside that of the Korean star actor Kim C; a playful dynamic between live performers and pre-recorded acted elements; and the interactivity between projected performance environments, into which the performers appear immersed, compared with the foregrounding of actors in traditional stagecraft. In one of Cowie's sardonic humorous episodes, he portrays Shakespeare as a writer trying to sell his work to two uninterested dancers who do not really know who he is and refer to him as 'Bighead'. References to the internet and the sales of work add to the multiple points at which literary cultural themes are interworked with dance, performance and movement cultures.

Over a period of two months a number of artistic and technical issues were addressed by Cowie in collaboration with the dancers and production team, and technical research was carried out on the artistic possibilities presented in the innovative combination of filmed dance and live dance in performance.

Cowie experimented with syncing between the performers. The filmed timings are fixed and it is very difficult to achieve naturalistic dialogue between live performers and their filmed counterparts without awkward pauses or text overlaps. This was solved by pre-recording the live dancers' speech, which they then lip-synced. Physical interaction between the filmed character of Shakespeare and the dancers strengthen the appearance of a singular world in which the dancers and Shakespeare exist.



***Shakespeare Needs You***  
Still details from recorded extract  
subtitled Bighead Asleep  
Seoul 2016

# RESEARCH INSIGHTS

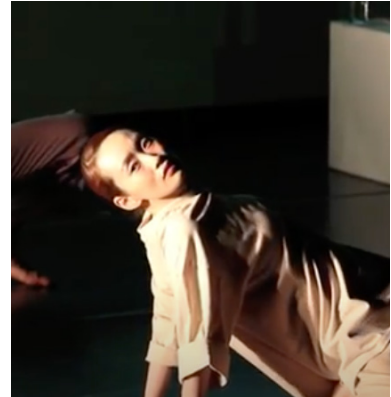
**Cowie's work brings theatrical and dance traditions together in a new artwork, generating understanding of where the separate forms begin to share ground and how they reinforce specific elements of each other's traditions.**

*Shakespeare Needs You* showed how historic and iconic theatrical plays, which exist only as a literary text until performed, can take on diverse meanings through displacement of various performative kinds. 'Bighead' both is and is not Shakespeare; by combining live action and recorded action, Cowie offers the audience a conundrum, making them question how much of what they are seeing is Shakespeare, and whether what they are seeing is theatre, film or dance. Underlying this is the wider question of where literary text can become dance and in what ways performance can help recognise both the boundaries and the blending.

The research took this displacement of Shakespeare to the limits of contemporary performance possibility using translated words, re-contextualised quotation and performers immersed in projected contemporary art works. It also uses an actor recognisable from film, here interacting as a film with other actors performing 'as live' yet with lip-synchronised, recorded voices.

Combining live dance and filmed dance raised issues during the making, both technical and logical. The potential of combining filmed dance and live dance are significant: the performance retains some of the visceral excitement of live dance which is often missing in film but at the same time allows many of the possibilities of film such as close ups to show movement detail.

The research added to the performance community's understanding of how and why live dance fused with film is a fruitful area for development. Cowie demonstrated that in order to work effectively there should be a dramatic context. Technically, he also highlighted the rigorous preparation necessary in order to take these techniques to a level in which they work for audiences in a natural theatrical context.



***Shakespeare Needs You***  
Still details from recorded extract  
subtitled Full Fathom Five  
Seoul 2016

# DISSEMINATION



**'Full Fathom Five' from  
*Shakespeare Needs You***

Dancer, Laura Rios  
Still from recorded extract,  
Havana Biennial 2019

(overleaf)

**Declaración Improducible**

Three pages from programme of  
the Havana Biennial, April 2019

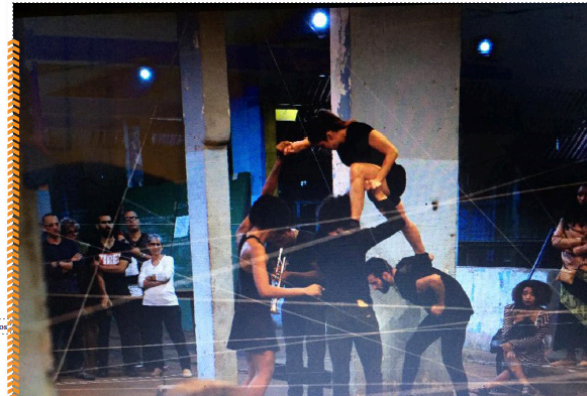
*Shakespeare Needs You* was premiered on 31 March 2016 at Cel Stage in Seoul, promoted by the avant garde showcase, Festival Bo:m, and by the British Council. <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3018249>

It was celebrated by the British Council as part of its UK-South Korea dance exchange work. [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/east\\_asia\\_arts\\_and\\_the\\_uk.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/east_asia_arts_and_the_uk.pdf)

Two extracts were performed by Laura Rios as an installation 'Danzas tempestuosas: En Varios Tiempos' at the Havana Biennial *Declaración Improducible*, 13-28 April 2019 and excerpts from the work are available through YouTube.



# Shakespeare Needs You



**DANZAS TEMPESTUOSAS: EN VARIOS TIEMPOS** | [rioscurbelolaura@gmail.com](mailto:rioscurbelolaura@gmail.com)

(performance)

*Danzas Tempestuosas: en varios tiempos*, es un performance danzario que nace con el precepto de procurar presentar una pieza coreográfica durante un tiempo no establecido, donde cada espectador la pueda apreciar en varias ocasiones, así como simplemente descubrirla en un espacio determinado. Expone mediante la repetición la evolución y las transiciones del cuerpo danzante. A su vez, muestra la significación del trabajo, lo simple que se complejiza en la trayectoria y lo mecánico o no que podemos ser como seres humanos.

Performance e Interpretación: Laura Ríos

Música y Coreografía / Billy Cowie

Textos / William Shakespeare (The Tempest)

Traducción y Voz / Clara García Fraile

Artista Visual / Silke Mansholt

**ANTES DE**

(performance)

Pieza creada como proceso de investigación, experimentación y construcción inside en el esfuerzo para lograr un objetivo, en esos obstáculos que descubrimos y creamos y en las decisiones complejas (o no) que tomamos ante determinadas situaciones. Como obra coreográfica acciona desde la individualidad un todo que confluye en un espacio-tiempo determinado.

Coreografía | Dirección general: Laura Ríos

Material Coreográfico | Intérpretes: Stephanie Hardy | Heriberto Meneses | Laura Ríos | Mario Varela

Músicos | José Arnulfo (Bajo) | Adrián Estévez (Piano) | Maiquel González (Trompeta) | Ruy López Nussa (Batería)

LAURA RÍOS nació en La Habana en 1992. Comenzó sus estudios a los 9 años en la Escuela Elemental de Ballet Alejo Carpentier, luego continuó en la Escuela Nacional de Danza (ENA) y más tarde ingresó al Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) en la especialidad de Arte Danzario. Fue miembro de la compañía Danza Contemporánea de Cuba durante ocho años, donde fue promovida a primera bailarina y además trabajó con importantes coreógrafos cubanos y extranjeros como Billy Cowie, George Céspedes, Julio Iglesias, Theo Clinkard, Jan Linkens, entre otros; a su vez presentándose en reconocidos teatros y festivales nacionales e internacionales. Actualmente integra Mi Compañía, agrupación que dirige Susana Pous.

Agrupación que surge súbita y rotunda.

Su práctica danzaria se basa en la creación desde el concepto, la experimentación y la profundización en el trabajo del cuerpo y sus límites; la investigación de fabricar el movimiento desde acciones reales y tareas específicas que así lo justifiquen; el intento de hacer una danza "no efímera", dejando huellas en el espacio que perduren físicamente y nazcan desde el movimiento y conceptos danzarios.

# REFERENCES

## Publications

Cawley, K.N. (2019) *Religious and Philosophical Traditions of Korea*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Klett, E. (2019) *Choreographing Shakespeare*. London: Routledge.

Lee, H. (2015) 'Conceptualizing Korean Shakespeare in the Era of Globalization'. *Performing the Nation in Global Korea: Transnational Theatre*. London: Palgrave Pivot.

Levy, D. (2006) 'Writing Dance'. Aggiss, L. and Cowie, B. with Bramley, I. eds. *Anarchic Dance*. London: Routledge.

## Works

Duke, B. (2015) *Paradise Lost Lies Unopened Beside Me*. <https://lostdogdance.co.uk/productions/paradise-lost-lies-unopened-beside-me/> (Accessed February 2021)

Oh, T-S. dir. (2011) *The Tempest*. <https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/tempest-oh-tae-suk-2011/#video=tempest-oh-tae-suk-2011> (Accessed February 2021)

(overleaf)

***Shakespeare Needs You***

Still detail from recorded extract

subtitled Bighead Asleep

Seoul 2016

## Shakespeare Needs You

