**SLAM THE POET** **- syndicated interview**

**for *Crowded***

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Slam the Poet is fascinated with the sensuality of words – their sights, sounds and textures. This interest has seen him perform as a poet within the cultures of hip-hop, jazz and ambient. His thirst for experimentation is deeply rooted in a joy for collaborative projects.

Slam the Poet appears in *Crowded* alongside fellow spoken word poets Desree and Laura Rae, with whom he also wrote the script, with additional text by Rosemary Harris. Developed in direct response to the growing number of teenagers in the UK struggling with their mental health, *Crowded* tells the story of ordinary young people whose anxiety, depression and desire leads to harmful and destructive behaviours.

**1. Tell us a little about *Crowded*. What’s the show about?**

*Crowded* is about three teenagers who go separately to a local community festival. We follow their paths through this busy day, full of excitement and nerves, anxieties and fears. It’s a story of managing your mind in the midst of a party.

**2. What was the inspiration for the story?**

As conversations about mental wellbeing are becoming more common, we’re generally getting a better understanding of clinical issues. However, often this understanding doesn’t extend to the low-lying, everyday funk that can precede these issues.

A lot of *Crowded* was inspired by these more pedestrian situations, the everyday anxieties that friends, lovers or bystanders have about those around them. It seems to me that having more sensitive, compassionate conversations around this aspect of more general mental wellbeing can help a lot of people before they develop more serious, clinically orientated mental ill health.

**3. How did the piece come to fruition?**

We wanted to write something that made the most of our diverse styles and experiences of mental health issues. There was some amount of conversation on where the play should be set, and how we would want to tie it all together, but mostly we wrote independently. Drafts were then brought together for editing and review by Rosemary Harris, before finally being tested on-stage in a rehearsal process.

For me, this independent writing time meant doing a lot of archaeological work looking into and back at myself as a teenager. Asking myself questions about what happened, how I felt, how I dealt with it. It was a really interesting process of selecting certain memories or experiences, abstracting them and then gluing them together to create a completely different person. As a result, my character feels very separate from me. I’m not sure if we would even have been friends! But at the same time, we have a very similar attitude, and I can empathise a lot with their situation.

***4. Crowded* is in a spoken word style. What does this mean?**

For me, the spoken word style means that *Crowded* isn’t scared to get excited about language. It’s not trying to be this perfectly naturalistic performance of how humans speak on a day to day. We are aware of how artificial performance is, and use that opportunity to exaggerate and enjoy how words sound next to each other, almost for their own sake.

At the same time, it’s not this hugely abstract, wild experiment that distorts language into incoherence! That wouldn’t be helpful to the very practical aims we have of opening conversations on mental wellbeing. Instead, we tread a careful balance, where the natural melodies, percussions and harmonies of our words are given space to shine.

It’s an attitude that takes the sound of words as capable of telling its own story, and in using that story to enrich the more “real” story of our characters.

**5. Poets often work alone. What’s it been like working with a company of other poet performers to create *Crowded*?**

Such a buzz! I’m a huge fan of collaboration and almost all of my projects are in some sense collective based. This was the first time working so closely with other writers though, and even though the writing process was quite solitary, the rehearsal and performance phase was so fun.

Desree and Laura Rae are lovely people, and incredible poets, and I’ve loved getting to hang out with them so much. We’ve come from very different artistic backgrounds so have a lot to share and learn from each other.

**6. What process do you go through when writing spoken word**?

For me, spoken word feels like a very different art form to written poetry. I spend a lot of time focussing on the sounds of the words, and the shapes they take in my body. I’ll have an object in mind (some memory, feeling or story), and will spend a long time trying listening, trying to work out how that object sounds. I feel like meaning comes from more than just dictionary definitions and that the sonic qualities of a spoken word are just as full. So, often I’ll spend time repeating a phrase, or freestyling some gibberish, to find the voice that fits the object.

Without getting too theoretical, words are just such beautiful things! All the tones, percussions and harmonies. When writing for speech, I want to maximise this sonic potential. My aim is a poetry that doesn’t pressure you to pay attention to every single word and its meaning. Instead, I want to perform in a way that audiences can zone out and understand everything that’s happening, because it’s there in the sounds and shapes I’m showing them.

**7. What would you say are the challenges of *Crowded*?**

Embodying such a huge emotional rollercoaster! It’s like disclosing a whole heap of turmoil several times a day, to a room of silent strangers. That’s obviously very exciting, and ultimately the kind of performance I want to give. But it can be really draining.

**8. How do you want audiences to feel during the show?**

I hope safe. It’s a heavy show that discloses a lot and by its nature can’t necessarily resolve everything for the audience. I know myself that those spaces can feel dangerous or detrimental to my own mental health. So I really hope we manage to make audiences feel safe in the performance to stay or leave or do whatever they need for their health and happiness.

**9. Describe *Crowded* in three words.**

Very. Good. Play.

**10. What can audiences look forward to?**

I’ll let them decide that for themselves!

**11. Finally, what inspired your career as a spoken word poet? What advice would you give to young people hoping to follow in your footsteps?**

I would say don’t be embarrassed! And trust yourself. You are already a master of your own language, and poetry is just playing with the rules a bit. The more you get into it the more you will find people exactly like you who are also really into it, who will help you feel a part of a big and beautiful poetic family. And that family will be ten times more inspiring than your *GCSE Anthology* ever was!

**ENDS**

**FURTHER DETAILS**

*Crowded* is a Half Moon and Apples and Snakes co-production: an exciting collaboration by the UK’s leading small-scale young people’s venue and touring company (2018 finalist and 2017 Off West End Award winner for Best Production for Young People Aged 13+) and England’s leading spoken word poetry organisation.

**For further information, interviews and press tickets please contact Stephen Beeny on 020 7709 8907 or stephen@halfmoon.org.uk**

A selection of production images can be downloaded from the Dropbox link below:   
[**https://www.dropbox.com/sh/240vtpoo6brg66f/AADw1FBoTTVIe0ysadEUZW66a?dl=0**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/240vtpoo6brg66f/AADw1FBoTTVIe0ysadEUZW66a?dl=0)