

# ***LEAP OF DEATH***

**Bookwork/LP and performance project**

**Supporting evidence and documentation  
February, 2015**



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## 1. Introduction

'Leap of Death' is a multi-media collaborative project inspired by research into the 'lost' 1928 FW Murnau film *4 Devils*.

The project had 5 main goals:

- 1) To create a multi-media artifact, available for sale as an affordable limited edition of physical copies, and as a free website and download.
- 2) To present the project in a series of live public 'launch' event/performances and school performances.
- 3) To expose new audiences to multi-media performance and art, as well as film history topics and artistic techniques related to the work.
- 4) To positively develop and promote the practices and careers of collaborating artists involved in the project, and cultivate new networks both within and across disciplines.
- 5) To form links with and positively contribute to the activity of schools and arts organizations in the South East.

We believe that the project was successful in achieving the objectives listed above. This document presents evidence of the activities carried out during this project, including photographs and links to web content. It is submitted in support of the 2,000 word 'Activity Report'.

### CONTRIBUTORS

**Project manager; composer/musician:**  
Robert Stillman

**Artistic collaborators:**

Anna Fewster (artist, printer, writer)  
Sarah Bryant (book binder)

**Musicians:**

Nick Malcolm  
Kit Downes  
Sean Carpio  
Magnus Dearness  
Theon Cross  
Sam Bailey  
James Maddren

**Web Designer:**  
Jenna Donnelly

**Academic consultant:**  
Michael Lawrence (University of Sussex  
Department of Media, Film, and Music)

**Partner organizations:**  
Canterbury Christ Church University

Brighton University

Sounds New Contemporary Music  
Festival

Free Range

Brighton Cinacity Film Festival

Simon Langton Girls Grammar

Canterbury Academy

Sidney Cooper Gallery



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## 2. Leap of Death limited edition bookwork LP.

The collaborating artists (composer/musician Robert Stillman, writer/artist/printer Anna Fewster, and bookbinder Sarah Bryant) created the limited edition bookwork/LP 'Leap of Death', integrating original music, image, and text in response to research into the 'lost' 1928 film *4 Devils*.







The bookwork enclosure was designed and fabricated by Sarah Bryant (Big Jump Press, Brighton).



The bookwork/LP's were made available for sale to the public both at project launch events, and on the project website, and 45 copies of the edition have been sold to buyers from a variety of locations, across 8 different countries. Five copies were retained for the contributing artist, and for project documentation.

To order a limited edition 'Leap of Death' bookwork/LP (£28.00 plus shipping), please use the Paypal button below.

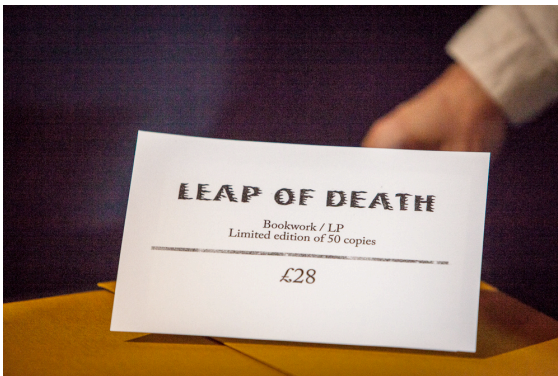
Shipping destination

Shipped to UK £34.50 GBP

Buy Now

MasterCard VISA VISA AMERICAN EXPRESS

For a free download of the 'Leap of Death' music, please click [HERE](#).



Central to this project's objectives was the accessibility of the output: the extremely low price of the bookwork/LP (£28.00) made it accessible to an audience that may not normally collect limited edition works. Feedback from those who purchased the bookwork/LP shows a great appreciation for the intricacy and detail of the bookwork/LP.

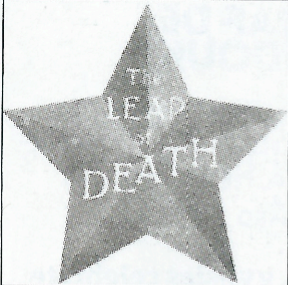
**Sample of feedback from "Leap of Death" bookwork/LP buyers:**

*"Leap of Death has arrived. I have played the record, I have opened and studied all the artwork. I want to show it to everyone I know, but I cannot. Even people one imagines will handle fragile things with care and respect often surprise with their rough and impatient fingers. Well, yes, there may be one or two I will show it to... but it will remain in my hands... it is too precious, too delicate to be handled more than once or twice. What a beautiful object... and what beautiful music" –Glenn Armstrong, Nottingham, UK*

*"You have created something here that is, for me, everything that music should be: narrative, beautiful, challenging, technical, emotive and moving." -Peter Buckley, Brighton, UK*

*" Looks capital-A Amazing - really a stunning piece of work".*

# New Albums



**ROBERT  
STILLMAN**  
**Leap Of Death**  
ARCHAIC FUTURE

**Brassy, magical score for  
a 1928 circus melodrama**

An arcane and lovely piece  
of work, *Leap Of Death* is  
based on a lost FW Murnau

**7/10**

movie about trapeze artists (*4 Devils*, from 1928) and comes with booklets, posters and so forth in a lavish edition of 50. The music, fortunately, works just fine in isolation (from [www.bandcamp.com](http://www.bandcamp.com)). Stillman is a US-born, UK-based composer with an innovative way of rethinking a creaky, generally neglected strain of Americana. As with the excellent *Machine's Song* (2011) and *Station Wagon Interior Perspective* (2012), Van Dyke Parks and Moondog seem useful names to drop. But the brass-heavy ensemble also suggests Albert Ayler, at once jaunty and melancholy, working the carnivals of a long-gone America.

**JOHN MULVEY**

### 3. Leap of Death Website

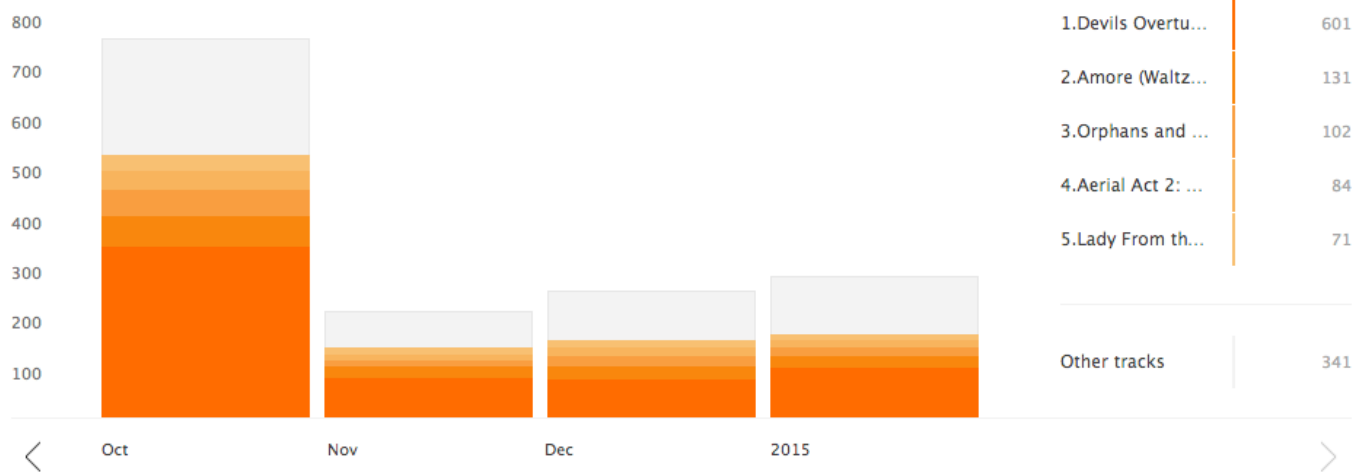
The bookwork/LP's music, text, and images were also incorporated into a 'Leap of Death' website, built by web designer Jenna Donnelly. In keeping with the aim of accessibility, the website (and link to free music download) allowed those who were not inclined to purchase the bookwork to experience it digitally free of charge.



The web platform also allowed the dissemination of the work to a much larger and wider audience than would have been possible: since the site went live, there have been c. 600 visits, and c. 1000 listens from users in 28 different countries.

1.3K Plays   4 Likes   2 Comments   0 Reposts   33 Downloads

Custom range  
Oct, 2014 - Jan, 2015



Top countries   Top cities

**U** United Kingdom  
718

2	United States	381			
3	Ireland	186	17	Korea, Republic of	3
4	Japan	73	18	Mexico	3
5	Austria	19	19	Ukraine	3
6	Canada	17	20	Belgium	2
7	Spain	17	21	Hungary	2
8	Finland	15	22	Czech Republic	1
9	Germany	13	23	Hong Kong	1
10	Sweden	12	24	Singapore	1
11	Netherlands	10	25	Switzerland	1
12	Denmark	8	26	Latvia	1
13	France	6	27	Malta	1
14	Italy	6			
15	United Arab Emirates	5			
16	Australia	4			



#### 4. Performances

A central goal of the project was to engage a wide audience with the work and this was successfully achieved through three public performances and two school performances.

##### A. Public performance: 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2013, Free Range at Veg Box Café, Canterbury

The first performance took place on 28 November at the Veg Box Café as part of the Free Range series. The concert was free of charge and advertised extensively by Free Range, thus attracting a venue-capacity number of c. 40 audience members from the local Canterbury community. Audience reception was positive, and both audience and band noted how the workshop performance format provided an informal setting for testing the work during a time of its early development.



##### B. Public performance: 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2014 Sounds New Contemporary Music Festival

The project 'launch' event was held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014 at Anselm Studio 1, Canterbury Christ Church University, as part of the Sounds New Contemporary Music Festival. An introductory, illustrated talk was given by Michael Lawrence, followed by a live performance of 'Leap of Death' featuring slide projections of bookwork content.







A reception was held directly after the performance, allowing the collaborating artists to engage with the audience, presenting and answering questions about the bookwork/LP on display, and the performance.



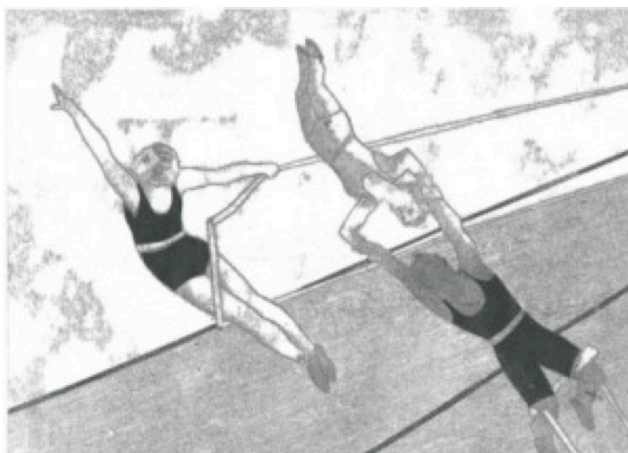
The event was highly successful, and benefitted greatly from the organizational support and promotion of Sounds New. The audience of c. 50, half of whom described themselves as going to such events either 'sometimes' or 'rarely', provided useful feedback, with the majority of the audience indicating that the evening was interesting/entertaining, and, for many in attendance, a new experience. The performance also received positive press coverage, helping to further promote the project.

**Feedback collected from audience (based upon 15 respondents to feedback forms).**

Age Range of attendees	15-20 = 1 % 20-40 = 47% 40-60 = 53 % 70-80 = 0% 80+ = 0%
"How often do you attend events of this kind?"	Often = 53% Sometimes 23% Rarely = 22%
Did you find the event interesting/inspiring/enjoyable?	Yes, Very= 93% Sort of = 7% Not so much= 0%
<p>Selected comments from forms:</p> <p><i>"Both artistic and academic value to the event; it balances film, cultural insight, music, and experimentation very successfully. A very enjoyable experience."</i></p> <p><i>"Fantastic ensemble playing- compassionately restrained and historically nuanced. After hearing this, I had to change (the question: how often do you attend events of these kind?) from "often" to "rarely.""</i></p> <p><i>"Loved all aspects. The 'sketches' shown in the talk 'dueted' in my mind with the printed book images. Loved the syncopations of image and sonic stories."</i></p> <p><i>"A lovely, unusual event- great musicians and wonderful idea."</i></p> <p><i>"A bit 'Arts Council' for me- too much reading and counting. I'd have liked more interaction between the musicians...play it more live and develop please- could be good."</i></p> <p><i>"What a beautiful evening- inspiring and moving. I liked the introduction too."</i></p>	

## Stillman's Leap of Death at the Sounds New Contemporary Music Festival 2014

Matthew Gilley    May 9th, 2014    1 Comment



Our outgoing Newspaper Editor, Matthew Gilley, checked out Robert Stillman's *Leap of Death* at the Sounds New Contemporary Music Festival that's currently being held in Canterbury this week.

In 1928, F. W. Murnau, probably best known for directing *Nosferatu*, released a film called *4 Devils* about the lives of a titular group of trapeze artists. The film has since been lost, but has now been given something of a second life by Robert Stillman, whose new work *Leap of Death* uses what clues there are about the film to create a suite of music inspired by *4 Devils* – basically an imagined soundtrack of sorts.

As it turns out, there's quite a lot of clues. A short lecture before the performance examines other circus films; articles by and interviews with Murnau; production skills and concept artwork; the book the film took inspiration from and the reviews from its original release. All the evidence points to *4 Devils* being quite good. As the introductory lecture said, at the time circus narratives were a cliché, but Murnau's idiosyncratic vision and his singular realism, combined with the ambiguous and fantastical, allowed the film to transcend its subject matter.

Something similar might be said of *Leap of Death*. The silent movie soundtrack, after all, has a long history and its typical dramatic jazz is likely to be familiar to most people. In recent years some artists have had a lot of success re-imagining the silent movie soundtrack in more experimental ways – like The Cinematic Orchestra or 65daysofstatic's re-scoring of *Silent Running*, admittedly not a silent film, but the principle is the same. Stillman, like both of these examples, takes the tropes of silent movie scores but does something not entirely familiar with them.

In a silent film, the music has to shoulder more of the narrative burden. Here it has to take almost all of it, although text fragments displayed behind the performers do help. Appropriately then, *Leap of Death* is wonderfully evocative. It whirls with the four trapeze artists, weeps with them and, when their bond is threatened by the arrival of a mysterious lady, the undercurrent of dread is unmistakable. Stillman's own saxophone is perhaps an instrument uniquely suited to

Full review available at:

<http://www.inquirelive.co.uk/culture/article-6472/stillmans-leap-of-death-at-the-sounds-new-contemporary-music-festival-2014/>



**C. Public performance: 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2014, Cinecity Brighton Film Festival, Sallis Benney Theatre, Brighton**

A final public performance of the project was given on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2014 at Sallis Benney Theatre, as part of the Cinecity Brighton Film Festival, again programmed with an introductory talk and reception. The numbers in attendance at the Cinecity performance were similar to the Sounds New Performance (c. 50). Feedback indicates that a large proportion of the audience attended such events 'rarely', and also reflects an audience desire for more visual content for the performance, which may relate to the film-orientated nature of this festival programme, and therefore, its audience's expectations.



Feedback collected from audience (based upon 15 respondents to feedback forms).

Age Range of attendees	15-20 = 13% 20-40 = 73% 40-60 = 20% 70 -80 = 1% 80 + =1
"How often do you attend events of this kind?"	Often = 40% Sometimes = 47% Rarely = 27%
Did you find the event interesting/inspiring/enjoyable?	Yes, Very= 11 % Sort of = 27 % Not so much= 0%
Selected comments from forms:	
<p>"Amazing score, probably would have preferred more images on screen Nice concept"</p> <p>"Would have loved to see more illustrations as they are beautiful, and lower lighting. Loved the idea though.</p> <p>"These images not really connect to the music sometimes. Expected some real footage from a film or at least stills from a film. But in general liked it.</p>	

## 5. School performances

Two school performances in the Canterbury area were organized in partnership with the Sounds New Festival. The first school performance was on 31<sup>st</sup> March at Canterbury High School, part of Canterbury Academy, and the second at Simon Langton Girls Grammar school. The Langton visit was rescheduled to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014 after the school cancelled the original 4<sup>th</sup> July date.



Each school performance was to a group of c.45 students ranging from ages 11-18. The music was introduced with a brief talk explaining the project. Based on feedback collected, the majority of students found the music to be ‘interesting/inspiring/enjoyable’ and something they had not often experienced, indicating that these visits helped achieve the original goal of engaging young audiences, and exposing them to new musical styles and performance approaches.

Student feedback for performance at Langton Grammar (46 respondents)

<p><b>“How often do you attend events of this kind?”</b></p>	<p>Often = 4% Sometimes = 30% Rarely = 65%</p>
<p><b>Did you find the event interesting/inspiring/enjoyable?</b></p>	<p>Yes, Very= 72 % Sort of = 28 % Not so much= 0%</p>

**Selected comments from forms:**

***“Atmosphere/tension was well created and held in the room with a lot of smooth, pleasing resolutions”***

***“Amazing! Never seen anything like this”***

***“I got a bit confused by the story line, but had a very clear circus-y feel.”***

***“I though this was really good and I really enjoyed it. The presentation was great, too.”***

***“I thought this was great and would love to hear it again. Thank you for bringing 4 Devils back to us in the modern day.”***

***“The trombinist was amazing and has definitely inspired me to pick up my trombone and play tonight”***

***“I really enjoyed the use of multimedia, and knew it was very well incorporated into the piece, and the composition, and how it created an atmosphere was sublime”.***

Student feedback for performance at Canterbury High School (29 respondents)

<p><b>“How often do you attend events of this kind?”</b></p>	<p>Often = 10% Sometimes = 21% Rarely = 69%</p>
<p><b>Did you find the event interesting/inspiring/enjoyable?</b></p>	<p>Yes, Very= 66% Sort of = 28% Not so much= 6%</p>
<p><b>Selected comments from forms:</b>  <b>“I had never seen anything like this before, but I really liked it! I would definitely want to see more by you, you’re very talented!”</b></p> <p><b>“It was very enjoyable and interesting. It was cool to see a keyboard in an orchestra”.</b></p> <p><b>“Unique and different approach to the 20’s style of music”.</b></p> <p><b>“I thought you captured the circus vibe really well. Really talented musicians.”</b></p> <p><b>“Occasionally the text on the screen was hard to read. Other than that really enjoyable”.</b></p> <p><b>“It was extremely fun to experience this music! Thorough enjoyed it and kind of interested in finding out more about the 4 Devils film.?”</b></p> <p><b>“If you added interaction and made the writing bigger”</b></p> <p><b>“I liked it because it is something I hardly ever see.”</b></p>	

*I thought the project was a very valuable one for the pupils on several levels. It gave them valuable experience of seeing professional performers at work, and to see and hear a composer talking about and performing his own work.*

*For many the project opened up a style of music that was unfamiliar and in itself challenging and engaging. The addition of visuals was an extra dimension that only enhanced the performance.*

*If we were to run a project such as this again in the future I think it would be a good to run it as part of a series of workshops, or as part of a whole day event so that pupils could have a chance to get inside the music more and to perhaps convert what they learn into either a performance or a composition of their own.*

**- Jon Williams, Head of Music, Simon Langton Girls Grammar**



## 6. Printing and Bookbinding workshop

A workshop in artist's book design and fabrication was held at Sidney Cooper gallery on 5th May 2014. The day-long session, advertised and promoted by Sounds New focused on techniques of letter press printing and book binding they used in the 'Leap of Death' bookwork. The workshop was attended by 11 participants from a wide age range (12-80), and with varied experience in this area, all of whom responded very positively. The workshops were successful in sharing specialist artist's techniques, and engaging the public in the project's methods of production.



### Feedback from workshop participants (9 respondents)

Age Range of attendees	10-20 = 9% 20-40 = 0% 40-60 = 56% 60 -80 = 22% 80 + = 9%
"How often do you attend events of this kind?"	Often = 15% Sometimes = 67% Rarely 16%
Did you find the event interesting/inspiring/enjoyable?	Yes, Very= 100% Sort of = 0% Not so much= 0%
Selected comments from forms: <i>"Excellent- a lot covered in one day and highly enjoyable".</i> <i>"Excellent and inspirational".</i> <i>"Excellent tuition. Informed, friendly, helpful".</i> <i>"A refreshing and interesting workshop with a great team of professionals."</i> <i>"Got more and more confident, and a great length".</i> <i>"A longer workshop would have been good".</i>	

## 7. Artists and organizations benefitting.

The work on this project created a substantial opportunity for each contributing artist to develop his/her practice. The multi-media, collaborative nature of the work encouraged the development of skills needed to integrate a diverse set of artistic materials into a coherent work. Such strengthening of skills will no doubt be useful in each artist's subsequent creative projects.

*'Four Devils' had a very significant impact on my practice; I learnt new book art techniques (through working in collaboration with Sarah), how to design material to be commercially printed (using InDesign), as well as making significant developments in my own printmaking (both letterpress and creating monotype images). The project really challenged me, but in a way that galvanized me to extend and expand my work in a way that has been - and I hope will continue to be - really important for my career. "*

Anna Fewster, collaborator (writer, printer, designer)



*"Leap of Death was such a unique project to be involved in - and one that I learned an awful lot from being part of. Not only did I learn Roberts amazing and challenging music, but also learnt about the history of this mysterious film and Anna's incredible prints for the project! I think the finished result we came up with was a beautiful example of how process is equally important to the end result - having time and space to work on the music (through rehearsal and recording) really brought us together as an ensemble - in a way that is obvious now when we play the music live. It was also very exciting being involved in a project that had such specific and high production values."*

Kit Downes,  
Organist



*"Since moving to the UK in 2012, I've been doing a lot more collaborative work. It has allowed me to maintain connections to artists and other colleagues in the US as well as developing relationships here in my new home. The Leap of Death project was the first time I've come on board purely as a binder rather than as a generator of content. It was a new role for me, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. I may choose to try it again, and the work I did this year with Robert and Anna will inform any future projects."*

Sarah Bryant, Bookbinder





This also project provided the opportunity to forge links with creative organizations in the South East region, each helping to bring this project to new audiences in the Southeast. The inclusion of Leap of Death in both music and film festival programs further helped to attract diverse audiences to each event. Feedback from these organisations support the positive contribution that 'Leap of Death' made to their ongoing efforts to promote public engagement with high-quality art and performance.

*'As Guest Artistic Director for the Sounds New Festival 2014, I was thrilled to present Leap of Death as one of our headline events in May. The work is both innovative, modest, eccentric and deeply engaging, and really connected with our audience. Much of the feedback described how the event brought together music, art and discussion in an unforced and approachable manner.'*

