

THE WITCHING WAY Synopsis

Created by Ali Matthews and Leo Burtin

Sunday 22 July, 7pm-8pm

*Please note: throughout the piece, original animations appear on a projector screen behind the performers in a 1990s 'zine' aesthetic, morphing in and out of surreal sequences. They are triggered live by a media artist.

As the audience walks in, they see five performers onstage. Three of them are playing musical instruments, 'tuning up' on guitar, drums/violin, and electric piano/bass. The fourth and fifth – a man and a woman – (Ali and Leo – step forward and begin to read directions for what sounds like a film. They describe two people much like themselves taking a journey from Pendle to Lancaster to retrace the steps of those tried as witches in 1612. They take turns describing some things that these two people discussed on their journey – about feminism, trust, and magic – and the obstacles they encountered. They finish and Ali goes behind a synth keyboard, while Leo sits in a chair on Stage Right in front of a lectern/music stand.

In a similar screenplay style, Leo reads directions for a film about W., a normal teenager who was born and raised a witch. He describes her sitting morosely in her bedroom, and the band (with Ali singing) break into 'Bedroom Song'. He then describes her walking to her Saturday job at a pharmacy where she is bullied by a coworker. The song 'Bullet/Gun' begins, detailing the cruelties W. has suffered. Leo interjects with directions about seeing a new employee enter who then becomes the object of bullying by both W. and her coworker. 'Bullet/Gun' comes back in. Leo's directions tell of how W. and her coworker come to the new girl's gig and throw fruit at her, culminating in W.'s realization of her own status as a bully. As 'Bullet/Gun' cuts out, Leo explains that W. has been magically transported to a completely different place. Leo's directions describe W.'s new surroundings in an old cottage where she discovers a notebook. As W. opens the notebook, the band plays a song about a character named Rowan. The song tells the story of how Rowan became a travelling merchant for her village.

At the end of the song, Leo's narration resumes, and he describes a scene where Rowan knocks on a wooden cabin's door and meets a new character named Jack. After this, the band plays a song describing Jack and his friendship with Rowan.

In the next section, Leo describes Rowan as pregnant and introduces a new character: an elderly woman named Hazel. The band plays a song called 'Fertile Myrtle' which describes the ritual making of a totem. Partway through, the song describes a storm beginning. Leo's description then goes on to describe the villagers pursuing Rowan with torches. The band sings 'Rowan Is A Witch'.

After this Leo describes that we are back with W. in the Old Cottage and the band sings a reprise of Rowan's song. The next scene describes an encounter with aggressive macho bulls by a small lake which is narrated in part by Leo and related through a song entitled 'The Battle of Bull Lagoon'. Leo then explains that W. manages to escape from her aggressor and continues walking in the rain until she reaches a strange pub. In this pub, she meets an array of colorful characters described in the song 'The Hark to Bounty Crew'. The song is a call and response between W. and the band which describes them forming a band together.

At the end of the song, Leo briefly gives three different options of screenplay locations. The described film either ends in W.'s bedroom, the forest or a stadium. Finally, the band performs a medley of a previously heard songs and the show ends on a blackout.