

Hallucinatory Cabaret. Heavy Magic

by Lonely Daddy

Something that shifts between spoken word, séance, stand up, and song.

I wear masks. I dress up. Count the beats. Hope the words hold.

I used to make my own masks when I lived in Belfast, years ago.

I liked the stickiness, and obnoxious odour, of latex.

I performed as a long-nosed clown. A kind of zombie disco priest.

He was my go-to, after my father died.

I think the character was my grief, and my father's grief, made flesh.

In the documentation, I see my father's face in the mask I'm wearing.

I performed countless times as this guy.

He, I, we, got around.

I loved him. He made me feel strong. He held my face. Then he was gone.

I moved to Italy, and started a family.

After I became a daddy, I wanted to put all my love and creativity into being 'Daddy'.

The mask was put away, into a box on the balcony.

The mask melted, that first Italian summer in Rome.

I got a job teaching. Tried to eke out time for art.

Like pinching lint from the pocket of your favourite jacket.

I banged out performance to camera. Doing the doable.

I built a stage in my home. Amps, mics, props, a handmade backdrop.

I could press a switch, and **buzz-hum**, DIY domestic cabaret.

I livestreamed when the kids were asleep. It was a lifeline during the pandemic.

Sometimes I missed my life before kids.

Days spent lolling about in the studio.

Dozing on a couch. Staring at the wall.

Cascading schemes. Hangover reveries.

Now the walls are covered in children's drawings. There's so much more love in my life.

In 2022, I was commissioned by Martin Carter, founder of The Lawrence Street Workshops, Belfast, to make *The Visitor*.

I had spoken to him about wanting to make live art again. It had been a while, nearly seven years.

But the time was right.

The idea was simple: domestic hallucinatory cabaret. By invitation only.

Strangers opening their doors, hosting live art in their living room.

Intimate. Charged. Risky.

On my summer break from teaching, I spent July in the studio, mic in hand, mask on head, letting the voice and energy of each character find me.

The vision?

A clownish ape performing surreal stand up as an opening.

A xenomorph delivering poetic spoken word as an interlude.

A meditative visit to Kurt Cobain's cabin in the afterlife as a final act.

By August, I was in Belfast, performing seven gigs in one week.

Each night followed the same rhythm: invite, arrive, perform.

We'd document it with a Polaroid: one for me, one for you.

Then, as the Polaroids slowly developed, we'd chat, unpacking the show.

There was always tension at the start of the performance.

I was a stranger, *The Visitor*, entering their homes in a hyper-realistic ape mask, a leather biker jacket, and bright blue satin running shorts.

No one knew what to expect, including me.

After the first joke landed, most people laughed. Tension released.

One evening, during the post-performance chat, the host said:

'For me, the whole piece was about depression. I don't know why. But that's what I kept feeling'.

I like that. It stayed with me. There's truth in it.

The project culminated in a one-off gig at The Workshops, Lawrence Street.

I performed in their large showroom.

The piece had a different life there.

Less tension, more joy and support.

I was gutted when it was all over.

Belfast *a/ways* does that to me.

Anger. Fortitude. Collectivity. You made me.

We had a big afterparty in the old lock keeper's cottage, by the river.

A lot of singing and drinking.

Simple medicine.

Not all of us are still around.