

**ROUGH GLORY FILMS**

and

**DESPERATE MEN**

present

# WASHED UP

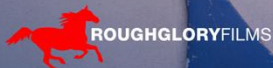
a film by **NATHAN HUGHES**

with **JON BEEDELL** and **RICHARD HEADON**

*'It just took 40 minutes of my life and repaid me with beauty, heart,  
art, love, humanity, soul, warmth and wisdom. I wish I could embrace you both  
and weep for life passing, art made and tides turning.'*

– Tim Crouch –

Love will conquer our mutual disdain



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
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**desperate men**  
STREET THEATRE, OUTDOOR EVENTS & COMMISSIONS

UK. 2018. Duration 39:46. Colour & Black and White

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## SHORT SYNOPSIS

An ageing comedy duo, stranded in an out of season fishing village, must decide if the devil you know is better than the devil you don't. (26 words)

Washed Up is a bleakly comic study of a personal and professional relationship in crisis. An unflinching look at the combustible tension that drives Desperate Men, one of the UK's best loved street theatre companies, to keep making vital work, for and with the people, after 37 years. The creative and emotional mechanics of their fractious but ever fruitful partnership are laid bare, as they reflect on personal and collective mortality, ecological precarity, and a unique legacy of desperation. (79 words)

## LONG SYNOPSIS

Jon and Richard (Desperate Men Theatre) are in an out of season Spanish fishing village to write a new Proxi and Peri film. Developed for Bristol European Green Capital 2015, these lovable characters (the tides made flesh), educate and entertain primary school children with a comedy show about complex ecologies of humans and water.

Jon is angry about humanity sleepwalking into a looming ecological crisis. He feels that Desperate Men's gentle eco-comedy routines are merely fiddling while Rome burns, and at 64, and financially comfortable, he wants to secure his legacy with a hard-hitting show about climate change. In contrast, Richard needs the money the Proxi and Peri shows make to pay his mortgage, and is exasperated with Jon's ambitions. Over breakfast, Richard challenges Jon to present an idea for a new show that will make any kind of difference. Jon says they could start by asking children how they feel about being one of the last generations to live on a planet devastated by anthropogenic impact. Richard accuses Jon of hypocrisy on account of his carbon intensive lifestyle, and states that all careers end in failure, and so is Jon's. As Jon storms off, Richard explains that they have a brotherly relationship, but like brothers, they fight, and that's what makes the sparks fly.

On a cliff above the village, Jon broods over their combustible relationship. He is disillusioned with the boring grind of their work and endless compromises made to find money. He reminisces about Desperate Men's uncompromising early days in 1980's Berlin, and provides a brief historical overview. Jon dislikes school shows because the children see him for what he is - an old man doing stupid things for money, and not the internationally respected actor / performer, he wants the world to remember him as.

Richard tells us that Jon is a clown with ambitions to be something he is not, while he, as the straight-man, uses clowning to provoke conversations about serious issues. In the Desperate Men office, attached to a printed note reading 'symmetry exists with chaos', is a hand-written note that reads - 'oh cheer up!' This is a clue to the queasy dynamic that enables very different people to sustain a twenty-year professional marriage despite regularly being at each other's throats. Jon, unconcerned with details, mocks Richard for organizing his costume cupboard, and laughs at his frustration when the system fails. Richard reveals that contempt is key to their street theatre work, and under brooding Spanish skies, we gain deeper insight into the mechanics of their antagonistic partnership.

Richard explains that since joining Desperate Men, his role has been to give a more user-friendly face to their work, in order to secure a regular income. Through interviews intercut with the Proxi and Peri films, and archive of their early provocations, we learn how they fell into working with environmental themes; and see more evidence of the explosive tension between Jon's maverick soul and Richard's need to earn a living from the arts. Jon equates the precariousness of the environment with their working environment, and sings 'Brother Can You Spare A Dime' on the piano, to mock Richard's financial worries. Jon is revealed as a shit stirrer who takes perverse pleasure in undermining Richard's attempts to make Desperate Men a viable business. Despite presenting himself as an arrogant bully, and for all his bold talk of going solo, we sense that Jon needs Desperate Men and Richard more than Richard needs Desperate Men and Jon. Richard says the well of love between them is deep, but the water has run dry.

As we venture deeper into the seething broth of loathing and tenderness driving this co-dependent relationship; fact, fiction, formats, and expectations are interwoven to propel us closer to the mystery of the what binds them together, and why they don't just go their separate ways. In a series of stylised cinematic vignettes, Jon and Richard, engage in a tense choreography inspired by Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, and we hear their internal 'conversation', as if, after twenty years, they can read each other's minds. They fantasize on the speculative murder of the other, and weigh up whether the devil you know, is better than the devil you don't. The end of Desperate Men seems inevitable.

Jon's encounter with a dead dolphin on the beach rekindles his fear of ecological catastrophe and sadness for his children's future. Richard arrives to resolve their day-long stand-off, and mocks Jon's fatalism. He makes Jon laugh by suggesting they might do a new children's show about a dead dolphin. Richard articulates a deep time/cosmic perspective – humanity is just a blip in the vast cycle of life. Jon's troubles arise from being trapped in material time by egoistic concern for his artistic legacy. They leave the beach arm in arm, discussing which animals it would be the most fun to reincarnate as.

Richard reminds us that all Desperate Men's work is about a conversation in the street. And in these shows, made with, and for the people, all the angst and fighting disappear; because the show is the love, and love conquers their mutual disdain. Despite his personal conviction that humanity is doomed, Jon concludes that it is morally wrong to deprive school-children of hope, and he remains optimistic about people's ability to change, otherwise he wouldn't do street theatre.

The sense of a positive uplift crashes into the inevitable fact that, given their age, and that no-one wants to take on the Desperate Men brand, their final curtain is calling. They speculate on what to do with almost forty years of costumes and props, and Richard says they should burn it all in a bonfire of the vanities. Jon struggles with the idea there will be no trace left of him or his work; but agrees that if they don't devise a final show befitting their unique legacy of desperation, one of them is likely to die in the saddle.

On the cliffs above the village, after a day when they contemplated splitting up, but instead recognized that they are stronger, and funnier, together than apart; they deliver their humble testimony - *"tell the truth, engage people, be loving, be honest, be funny, be human... that's all we can be."* (1041 words)

## STATEMENTS

### DIRECTOR

The tender antagonism of what appear to be dysfunctional, co-dependent relationships fascinates me, particularly when it is a critical driver of vibrant cultural production. I also love cantankerous comedy double acts and redemptive buddy movies. After working with Desperate Men to develop their Proxi and Peri characters (the tides made flesh), I wanted to understand how, and why, they kept working together despite significant personal differences.

I was intrigued by the hybrid documentary potential of locating the simmering resentment of Channel 4's Peep Show in widescreen frames inspired by Sergio Leone's iconic westerns, which is why we shot in Cabo de Gata, Spain. I see Washed Up as a Peep Show spaghetti western, which blurs fact and fiction to put a professional marriage under the microscope, and reveal how mutual disdain can be conquered by love.

In playing semi-fictionalised versions of themselves in an out of season Spanish fishing village, Desperate men also embody humanity, facing a looming threat of environmental catastrophe. Their candid reflections, from the vantage point of four decades of politically informed street theatre, echo contemporary anxieties in response to anthropogenic climate change.

### DESPERATE MEN

This is us, warts and all, grappling with each other's moods and motivations, yet again working very hard for almost nothing, but doggedly keeping going to produce something interesting, and perhaps worthwhile. I'd like all our peers to see this and laugh out loud at our petty absurdities, but also to recognise something of their own creative struggles, and the sense of time running out. This film means a lot to us - after 37 years of the company's existence and 22 years of Richard and I working together, it's an honest look at how we manage to function and create new work despite our differences, sulks, stubbornness, and volatility. I hope it teaches us all a damn good lesson.



## FILMMAKERS – BIOS & CREDITS

### **Nathan Hughes** – Director / Writer / Producer

Nathan's work across documentary, drama and design fiction was cited as 'demonstrating a distinctive cinematic and artistic vision' by Encounters Festival (2012). He is currently seeking to finance a dark comedy feature set in West Wales, from his screenplay developed through London Screenwriter's Festival Talent Campus initiative 2016, and London Comedy Film Festival's Kick Start Your Comedy Career Masterclass 2017. [roughgloryfilms.com](http://roughgloryfilms.com)

### **Jacob Parish** – DOP / Editor

Jacob has worked in film and TV for over twenty years and splits his time between editing high end BBC nature documentaries and working as a DOP on a variety of docs, dramas, commercials and music vids. Jacob is currently working as a DOP on an original Netflix conservation series. [smallstorytellers.com](http://smallstorytellers.com)

### **John Beedell** – 'Actor' / Co-Producer

Hates working at laptops, e-mails, mobile phones, and screens of any kind, and is happiest in a field full of actors and artists grappling with the impossible. He believes street theatre can change the world – reconnecting people, reclaiming public spaces, inviting participation and direct involvement – the imperative democratic performative – with provocative thinking, happy tears and new ideas. [desperatemen.com](http://desperatemen.com)

### **Richard Headon** - 'Actor' / Co-Producer

Joined Desperate Men in 1996. Recent projects include Co-Artistic Director for Wye Valley River Festival (WVRF) 2016-18 and Bristol 2015 Green Capital project Bristol Loves Tides. Previously provided creative direction for The Nativity Cycle, The WVRF 2014, Battle for the Winds (Cultural Olympiad 2012), The Severn Project (2006-09). Performance work includes Slapstick and Slaughter, Darwin and the Dodo, and The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

### **Elizabeth Purnell** - Composer

Composer, arranger and sound designer working in film, theatre, TV and radio. Elizabeth is also an orchestrator who has worked on many BAFTA, EMMY and Academy Award winning scores for feature films, TV Drama, pop arrangements and BBC natural history series.

[elizabethpurnell.com](http://elizabethpurnell.com)

### **Angel Pérez Grandi** - Sound Designer

Angel's company - Sound Ark - delivers tailor made audio solutions, inclusive of every aspect from location sound to final mix. Producing consistently high caliber sound effects, using state-of-the-art technology and a commitment to achieving our clients' audio-vision.

[soundarkstudios.com](http://soundarkstudios.com)

### **Chris Lyons** - Colourist

Chris has worked across multiple stages of post-production for over 8 years, and currently works in distribution for Oscar winning Aardman Animations. Chris is an in-demand colourist, creating desired looks and aspirations for a broad range of independent film projects. [aardman.com](http://aardman.com)

## ACCOLADES

"It just took 40 minutes of my life and repaid me with beauty, heart, art, love, humanity, soul, warmth and wisdom. I wish I could embrace you both and weep for life passing, art made and tides turning." — Tim Crouch —

"It is eye wateringly hilarious, beautiful, daft, dark, honest, melancholic and exquisitely filmed & edited. It hits the sweet spot somewhere between Beckett and the End of The Pier."  
— Dave Young (Trans Mutation) —

"It's brilliant... it's quite a thing of beauty."  
— Loz Samuels (Artistic Director Devizes Outdoor Celebratory Arts) —



## PRESS & NEWS

A Theatre Bristol Interview with Desperate Men and the Director – August 2017  
<https://theatrebristol.net/washed-up-and-desperate-new-frontiers-for-desperate-men/>

We ran a successful campaign to finance post production  
text and images here - <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/washed-up-1/>

## CONTACT

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FILM STILLS



Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men  
*Holy Sonnet 10 (Death Be Not Proud) - John Donne*