



presents

# **Last Gasp: A Recalibration**

by Split Britches



**Ellen Stewart Theatre**  
**66 East 4th Street, NYC, 10003**  
**October 13 - 30, 2022**

# **Last Gasp: A Recalibration**

by Split Britches

**Created in collaboration with  
Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw, Nao Nagai,  
Vivian Stoll and Morgan Thorson**

**Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw  
Writers and Performers**

**Lois Weaver Director  
Nao Nagai Visual/Lighting Design  
Vivian Stoll Sound/Music Design  
Morgan Thorson Choreography**

**Susan Young Costumes  
Matt Delbridge, John Jesurun Design Consultations**

**Laura Hunter Petree Producer  
Shara Antoni Social Media  
Kim Jae I Production Intern**

*Last Gasp: A Recalibration* is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, in addition to the Wellcome Trust, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the NYC Women's Fund for Media, Music and Theatre by the City of New York Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment in association with the New York Foundation for the Arts. Research residencies for the development of *Last Gasp* were completed with the Guthrie Theatre; Metal Culture, Peterborough; Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts; the Barbican and La MaMa ETC.

*Running time 60 minutes with no intermission*

The film *Last Gasp WFH* was created during the first 4 months of the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown. It was a collaboration of creative survival between 5 friends (Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw, Nao Nagai, Vivian Stoll, and Morgan Thorson), 2 countries, and 3 time zones. Special thanks to Emily Sharpe and Steven Deadman for the generous emergency occupancy of their fine old house and to Helen Idle, Joan Leese, Alex Legge, Beccy Trowler, Ali Mears, and the Clod Ensemble for their support during those months.

In March 2020, we walked into an old house that had stood empty for several years and made *Last Gasp, WFH* with the few things we had with us. The house became our home and our collaborator. In making *Last Gasp: A Recalibration*, we wanted to do the same. Bringing a few things with us, we walked into the vast, empty space of the Ellen Stewart Theatre, a space that had already been our home for many years, with the desire to honour both the presence of all who have lived here before and the absence of all that we have lost.

*Last Gasp: A Recalibration* was developed by the collaborative team, adapting *Last Gasp WFH* to the stage and for the current moment with the addition of costumes by Susan Young and design consultation with Matt Delbridge and John Jesurun.

Split Britches would like to acknowledge the support of Stormy Brandenberger, an ongoing member of our collaborative family who was not directly involved in this project.

**Thanks also to our friends,** Joy Tomchin, Susan Thames, Eric Hammerstrom, Mermer Blakeslee, Arwen Wilder, Eleanor Savage, the Department of Drama at Queen Mary University of London, the Theatre and Performance Department at Goldsmiths, University of London, and the Barbican (London) for their support. And an extra special thank you to our family at La MaMa ETC (NYC) for providing the home and foundation for our work in NYC that has supported us through the years and through thick and thin.

*Last Gasp WFH* was nominated for an Outstanding Digital Theater, Individual Production Award at the 87th Annual Drama League Awards.

**The film will be available to ticket holders of Last Gasp: A Recalibration until November 30,2022 at this link: <https://vimeo.com/481117325/4cacf2576a>**

## Split Britches

Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw are co-founders of Split Britches . Since 1980, they have created an interconnected repertoire of performance and social engagement work, which is part of a larger, lifelong project to facilitate communication, wellness, and social change through performance. Recent projects include *Ruff* (2013), a performance exploring the experiences of having a stroke; *Unexploded Ordnances* (2018), a combination of performance and public conversation on subjects of anxiety, ageing, and unexplored potential; and *Last Gasp* (2020), a meditation on demise – demise of ageing bodies, civil conversations, and a sustainable planet. Over the 40 years, they also remain committed to collaborating with diverse communities. This manifests in the founding of **WOW Café** in NY; developing projects in domestic abuse safe houses in upstate NY and in LGBTQ+ communities in Minneapolis; collaborating with seniors on a performance about sex and ageing; working in women's prisons in Brazil and the UK; developing performance with Taiwan Women's Theatre Festival and creating therapeutic workshops for stroke survivors.

Split Britches' collection of scripts, *Split Britches Feminist Performance/ Lesbian Practice*, edited by Sue Ellen Case, won the 1997 Lambda Literary Award for Drama. In 2012, Split Britches was presented with the Edwin Booth Award by City University of New York honor of their outstanding contribution to the New York City/American Theater and Performance Community. Both Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw are Guggenheim Fellows and Peggy was the recipient of the Doris Duke and USA Artist Awards. Lois and Peggy were named Senior Fellows by the Hemispheric Institute of Performance in 2014, an award given to scholars, artists and activists affiliated with the institute whose work illustrates the highest achievement in the field of performance and politics. The company received a 2017 NY Innovative Theatre Award and the 2022 Ellen Stewart Career Achievement in Professional Theatre Award.

**Lois Weaver** is an artist, activist and Professor of Contemporary Performance Practice at Queen Mary, University of London. She is a 2014 Guggenheim Fellow and a Wellcome Trust Engagement Fellow for 2016-2018. Lois was co-founder of Spiderwoman Theater, WOW Café Theatre in NYC and Artistic Director of Gay Sweatshop in London. She has been a writer, director and performer with Peggy Shaw and Split Britches since 1980. Recent performances include *Unexploded Ordnances* (2016-18); *What Tammy Needs to Know About Getting Old and Having Sex* (2015); and *Ruff* (2012). Her experiments in performance as a means of public engagement include Long Tables, Porch Sittings, Care Cafes and her facilitating persona, TammyWhyNot. She was awarded the WOW Women in Creative Industries Award for Fighting the Good Fight in London 2018. Lois's performance practice and history has been documented and illustrated in *The Only Way Home Is Through the Show: Performance Works of Lois Weaver*, eds. Lois Weaver and Jen Harvie, published in 2015 by Intellect and the Live Art Development Agency.

**Peggy Shaw** is a performer, writer, producer and teacher of writing and performance. She co-founded Split Britches and WOW Café Theatre in NYC. She is a veteran of Hot Peaches and Spiderwoman. She is a 2019 Guggenheim Fellow, and a 2014 recipient of the Doris Duke Artist and 2016 USA Arts Award. In 2017, Peggy was awarded an honorary doctorate from Queen Mary University of London for her contribution to theatre and the institution. Peggy has received three NYFA Fellowships and three OBIE Awards. She was the recipient of the 1995 Anderson Foundation Stonewall Award and Foundation for Contemporary Arts Theatre Performer of the Year Award in 2005. Her book *A Menopausal Gentleman*, edited by Jill Dolan and published by Michigan Press, won the 2012 Lambda Literary Award for LGBT Drama. Peggy was the 2011 recipient of the Ethyl Eichelberger Award for the creation of *Ruff*, a musical collaboration that explores her experiences of having a stroke.

**Nao Nagai** would like to be known a useful passer-by who got curious. However, she is a London based lighting designer, technical collaborator and performer from Japan. After immigrating to the UK at the age of 15, she trained at Rose Bruford College in Lighting Design and has been lighting and collaborating on multigenre performances inter/nationally. Credit includes: *Last Gasp WFH* (Split Britches), *Dan Daw Show* (Dan Daw Creative Project), *Trouble in Mind* (National Theatre), *Scenes with Girls*

(Royal Court), *Yellowman* (Young Vic), *Ceremonial Blue* (Midori Takada and Lafawndah), *Copyright Christmas* (Duckie), *Madama Butterfly*, *Tosca* (Arcola Theatre), *OUT*, *Night Clubbing* (Rachel Young), *the moment I saw you I knew I could love you* (Curious), *Dr Carnesky's Bleeding Woman* (Marisa Carnesky) and many more. Nao also performs regularly with the cult pop performance group, Frank Chickens (winner of Foster's Comedy God Awards). She is a tutor in Lighting Design at Goldsmiths, University of London.

**Vivian Stoll** is a sound designer, audio engineer, music producer, and musician. She has created music and sound design for the Split Britches Company for over 20 years and has been a collaborator on several projects. Past musical credits include work with Unknown Gender, Isis, Malvina Reynolds, Penny Lang, Rosalie Sorrels, Frank Maya, Jon Kinzel, Rebecca Coupe Franks, Laurie Anderson, and Bitch among many others. She has taught sound design to film and animation students and is currently working on several independent music projects. Visit her website at [www.vivianstoll.com](http://www.vivianstoll.com).

**Morgan Thorson** is a dance-maker, performer, activist and interdisciplinary artist, based in Minneapolis. Her dance-work has been commissioned by venues such as Walker Art Center, On The Boards, Fuse Box Festival and Maui Arts & Culture Center. In 2015, her installation work, *Still Life*, was featured in Local Time, a three-month exhibition at the Weisman Art Museum and, in 2021, *Group Choreography*, was part of a visual art exhibition at SIM in Reykjavik, Iceland. Morgan is currently involved in several research projects including the art of negotiation, audio description, embodied nightscapes, deep listening as well as developing dance essays with Split Britches.

**Susan Young** has collaborated since 1982 in preeminent experimental theatre: Split Britches, WOW Café, La MaMa, PS 122, The Five Lesbian Brothers, Bloo Lips and The Ridiculous Theatrical Company. In 1989, Susan received an Obie Award and an American Theater Wing Award for Costume Design. In the early 1990's, she began a successful 25-year career at women's fashion brand Eileen Fisher, first as Technical Director, then as global Manufacturing Leader. Retired in 2016, Susan has earned a graduate degree in Visual Arts Education at Hunter College, and she now volunteers in Craft Development and Sales at House with Heart- home for abandoned girls and skill center for income enhancement of adult women - located in Kathmandu, Nepal. Susan joined *Last Gasp: A Recalibration* in London in 2020 prior to Covid lockdown, returning to London in October 2021 when the show was staged at the Barbican Theatre. She is delighted to be back with Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw and team to open in NYC at La MaMa.

## SPECIAL EVENTS

### ***Last Call: Cocktails and Conversation with Split Britches***

FREE EVENT

**Tuesday, October 18, 2022 at 6:00PM**

Ellen Stewart Theatre @ La MaMa

Last Call: Cocktails and Conversation with Split Britches

Introduced and moderated by Benjamin Gillespie

Join Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver and their collaborators for cocktails and an intimate discussion about the duo's latest performance, *Last Gasp: A Recalibration*.

The evening will include a presentation from the current book project anthologizing more than a decade of work by Split Britches.

This is a free event, reservations are required.

Limit 2 tickets per person, please.

<https://web.ovationtix.com/trs/pe/11149975>

### ***Care Cafe 2022***

Lois Weaver + Peggy Shaw

**Sunday, October 23, 2022 at 3:30PM**

Ellen Stewart Theatre @ La MaMa

Immediately following the 10/23 matinee of *Last Gasp: A Recalibration*, Lois and Peggy will hold a *Care Cafe*.

This is a free event. If you are attending the performance at 2pm, there is no need to make a separate reservation. But if you would like to attend the *Care Cafe* only, please reserve your spot here!

<https://web.ovationtix.com/trs/pe/11167389>

## **Excerpts from a Fractured Atlas interview with Nina Berman on the company and the creation of Last Gasp, WFH**

<https://blog.fracturedatlas.org/member-spotlight-split-britches>

For over 40 years, Split Britches has been creating art that is both lesbian and feminist. Split Britches projects span theater, solo performance, live art, workshops, digital media, models for public conversation, and written work. Founded by Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw, Split Britches “is about a community of outsiders, queers, eccentrics – feminist because it encourages the imaginative potential in everyone, and lesbian because it takes the presence of a lesbian on stage as a given.”

In addition to her work as an artist, activist, and facilitator, Lois Weaver is a professor of Contemporary Performance at Queen Mary University in London. Peggy Shaw is a performer, writer, and teacher. They have been awarded Guggenheim Fellowships as well as grants and fellowships from other institutions like the Doris Duke Foundation, NYFA, and the Wellcome Trust.

Their work is rooted in the experimental, downtown New York theater scene and a strong DIY ethos.

Their most recent work “Last Gasp WFH” was created in isolation and presented through May 31 by La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club. Lois, Peggy, and their collaborators used spoken word, movement, and a virtual-first approach to creation to engage questions of breath, home, and a world that appeared to be crumbling around them. The New York Times referred to it as “not just one of the 40-year-old company’s best pieces, but among the most evocative art to emerge from the Covid era.”



## **Tell us about your work or project. What inspired it and how do you hope it will impact people?**

In March 2020 we were in London preparing for a performance that was going to be live and suddenly the world locked down and we were stopped in our tracks! Through a series of lucky happenings, we found ourselves sheltering in place in a spectacular abandoned house, and we decided to continue working on the piece just in case the world did open up. And as we continued working over the course of several months we realized we weren't making a live performance anymore – we were creating a digital performance that could be publicly shared during the pandemic. Suddenly the show we had been working on had an entirely new resonance – it was titled “Last Gasp” before we were living through a pandemic that was caused by a respiratory illness. We wanted to express some of the experience of living in that time, living in our last gasp of age being older artists, living in the last gasp of our planet struggling to breathe, living in the struggle for racial justice and social unrest that came about from George Floyd's murder. Ideas about what it means to breathe became relevant and we want people to come together to meditate on that with us in the performance.

## **Describe the process you've taken to bring your project to life. What's been involved?**

We really decided to take the approach of using what we have – like in the way our friend Heather Acs talks about all of her friends coming together for a night dumping everything that they had in their pockets on a table and making something with it. So we started filming over Zoom – Lois and two of our collaborators Vivian Stoll and Nao Nagai were all teaching and really getting in the headspace of Zoom so their brains were already adapting to that digital space, and we began to think about what it meant to make a live performance digitally. We were also working internationally, working with Nao Nagai in London, Vivian Stoll in Brooklyn, and Morgan Thorson in Minneapolis. It was a truly invigorating process that spurred a new practice for us which is important as we age to give us increased accessibility in making and sharing performances, and also helping us reach a larger audience.

## **What have been your biggest challenges with this project or with your work?**

Really it's people's preconceptions about what it is we do. We bill ourselves as a feminist and lesbian theater company, and people immediately assume that they know what that is and know what the work is based on from those identifiers. We actually don't make work about being lesbians or being feminist, we explore the work through those lenses which means the work is often different than what a lot of people expect. Throughout our 40-year careers we've also been marginalized because of our sexuality, gender, class background, age, politics - and haven't been given the same kinds of opportunities as others. In some ways this project has helped us transcend some of that, which might partially be because we're not in person.

## **For you, what is the relationship between art and social change? How does your work fit into that relationship?**

We use performance as a way to move through whatever personal challenges we are facing at the moment, whether its identity, ageing, or current circumstances like politics or social climate. The personal has always been political for us as working class white feminist aging lesbians.

In more recent years we have also wanted to literally involve audiences in the world of our work, like in "Unexploded Ordnances (UXO)," "What Tammy Needs to Know About Getting Old and Having Sex," or in the Public Address Systems project.

## **Any upcoming events that people should know about? What's next for you that we should be keeping an eye out for?**

Next on the horizon is a project we have been developing called "Sheltered in Place." "Sheltered in Place" is a digital public engagement infrastructure housing community, conversation, and creative expressions. It explores what it means to stay home in the context of a global pandemic and what shelter and place might mean to us as we move out of this crisis and into the future. We don't know exactly when this will launch, but keep an eye out in the next month or so!

If you'd like to get in touch about "Last Gasp WFH" please contact , at [info@split-britches.com](mailto:info@split-britches.com).

**A full program with information on this  
production can be found on the  
*Last Gasp: A Recalibration*  
page of the La MaMa website.**

**In addition you can scan the  
QR code Poster located in the theatre  
lobby for access to the digital program.**

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*Rendering: 74 East 4th St.*

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Oct 14 - Oct 30, 2022  
Ellen Stewart Theatre

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Oct 15 - 16, 2022  
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### **The History of Empires**

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Ellen Stewart Theatre

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Nov 7, 2022  
The Downstairs

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Nov 10, 2022  
Ellen Stewart Theatre

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### **Coffeeshouse Chronicles #167: 55th Anniversary of Rod Rodgers Dance Company**

Nov 19, 2022  
Ellen Stewart Theatre

### **Jump Start: A Presentation of Puppet Works in Progress**

Dec 1 -4, 2022  
The Downstairs

### **Underneath the Skin**

Dec 1 - 18, 2022  
Ellen Stewart Theatre