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Where am I? Home Arts & Entertainment Stage **Dance**

From [The Times](#) June 2, 2008

## Monkey! - where bungee meets ballet

[Brian Logan](#)

Imagine combining the spectacle of ballet with the sensation of chucking yourself off a bridge in New Zealand with some elastic tied to your feet. That's the effect produced by bungee-assisted dance, and one of its leading practitioners in Britain is Wendy Hesketh. The theatrical effect, she says, is “this incredible movement that would be impossible, absolutely impossible, without a bungee”.



### Explore Stage

- Theatre
- Comedy
- Opera
- Dance**

### Editor's choice

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- Artist Dylan has got everything
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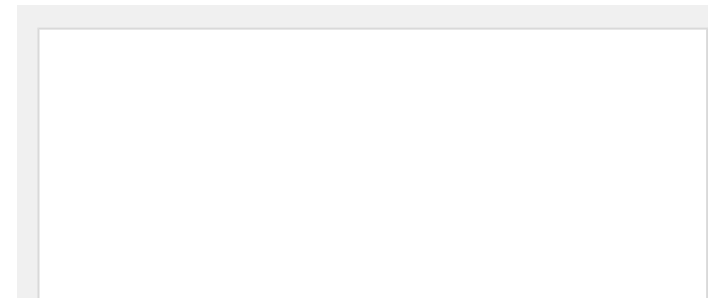
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### Today

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"There's loads of aerial stuff going on," says Hesketh of the West Yorkshire Playhouse production, "trapeze, ropes, silks." The hero of Monkey! journeys to the western heavens to collect the teachings of Buddha, and Hesketh plays the monk Tripitaka, whose spiritual qualities are greatly enhanced by the fact that she doesn't stroll along with Monkey so much as soar by his side.

She started professional life as a dancer, and came to aerialism after a stint with the explosive Argentine troupe De La Guarda. There, she defied gravity on the end of a rope. "But I really missed my dancing." With another member of De La Guarda, Jamie Ogilvie, she began exploring how ground-based dance could be combined with flying. "We wanted to create an illusion onstage," she says. "We wanted people to forget that the rope was there and just watch the body moving in the air and on the floor." They experimented with normal rope, and with conventional harnesses. But it was only when Hesketh (who has never done a bungee jump) discovered elastic that her work with Ogilvie, and the company they co-run, Wired Aerial Dance, really took off.

They are very much a double act. Hesketh is the one who hovers in the air. But it's Ogilvie, frantically tying and untying knots, pulling and releasing the bungee rope backstage, who makes sure that she can do so with grace. "I need to know the choreography as well as Wendy," he says. "When I'm pulling backstage, I have always to be a second or two before the dancer."

It's as if they're dancing together, separated by a long cord. "There's such a relationship there," Hesketh says, "and it's all on trust. You need to be able to communicate as a pair."

With Monkey! the pair are "fighting the urge to go big", Hesketh says. "With a bungee, everybody wants to see you swing out above their heads, or jump towards them and just miss them by inches. But there's also great beauty in the more subtle things, and that's what we're going for."

And so the Leeds version of the Chinese myth promises to be as magical as the 1970s TV series. Or more so. "You've seen Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon?" Hesketh asks. "That's exactly what we're doing. But we're doing it on ropes." The Leeds Monkey! should make an arresting spectacle. "When anyone sees anything moving in the air with seeming ease - think even of that plastic bag in the film American Beauty - there's an absolute beauty in that," Hesketh says.

"And people can watch it and watch it. That's what bungee-assisted dance is like. We're taking dance movement and pushing it even farther."

Monkey! is at the West Yorkshire Playhouse (0113 213-7700 www.wyp.co.uk) from June 14. Details of Hesketh and Ogilvie's other shows,



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Dominic Maxwell

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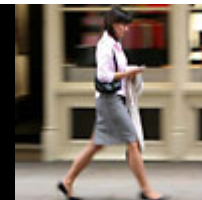
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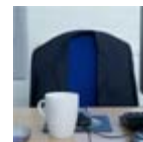
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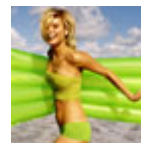
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