



THEATRE BRISTOL

ANNUAL REPORT 2015 - 2016

Theatre Bristol is a small group of people with a mission to create the best conditions to make, experience and take part in awesome theatre*.

*By theatre, we mean all kinds of live performance, from sound walks to circus, contemporary dance to musical theatre.

We are a small part time team, working from an office on York Road in Bedminster, Bristol. We are an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and a Bristol City Council Key Arts Provider. This is our annual report which explains what we have been doing over the last year, and some of our plans for the future.

If anything excites you and you'd like to find out more, get in touch at info@theatrebristol.net



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HEY HEY, WE'RE 10!

We wanted to find new ways of introducing Theatre Bristol to people who don't already know us, so in our 10th birthday year we invited artists to respond to a commission that would explain and celebrate our achievements and impact.

The resulting project was a comic-style publication created by artist Mr G Johnson that tells the story of our first 10 years. Launched at our birthday party, we have free copies of the book in our office for anyone who wants one, or you can check it out online.

Since our launch in 2005 our approach has been to think like an artist, designing our activity in response to the best ideas and delivering them through the best possible collaborations. We've worked hard to create a strong ecology, where people share ideas, knowledge and resources. As a result we've become a core part of Bristol's theatre infrastructure, and we're a trusted and valued part of the sector. Over the next 10 years we want to see a fundamental shift in how people understand and value the role of art and artists in society, making them central to people's lives and the places they live.

Image: Mr G Johnson from our 10 years of Theatre Bristol publication



WORKING WITH ARTISTS*



*When we talk about artists we mean writers, circus artists, puppeteers, dancers, live artists, producers, directors, technicians, funders, stage managers, musicians, composers, thinkers, administrators, bookkeepers, fundraisers, critics, enthusiasts, supporters... everyone who is interested is welcome.

Artist support is at the heart of who we are and what we do.

For a rich and resilient cultural ecology to exist artists need advice, training, development and other artists. The right support drives quality up, and by working across the whole sector we can broker relationships and collaborations, creating more opportunities. Because artists are all different our support is bespoke and always tailored to the individual.

In 2015 we made a significant shift in how we offer reactive artist support. Artists have a wealth of experience that they already generously share, so we designed a new structure that acknowledges and strengthens this existing peer support. One pair of artists at a time - 6 individuals over 3 years - share their invaluable know-how, whilst continuing to develop their own work.

This year also saw the final stage of our 3.5 year Company Producer pilot, created in response to the need of established artists for more dedicated producer support.

In 2015-16: Theatre Bristol producers supported 158 artists and saw 200 performances. 31 artists came to talk to us and each other at 5 open offices. 10 artists used our free hot desks and we hosted 1 Associate Producer.

14 producers worked alongside each other for peer support and to encourage collaboration at 4 Producer Clubs.

Action Hero, supported by our Company Producer, toured nationally and internationally from Bristol and London to Greece, Japan and South Korea.

As the first year of our Artist Support Associate pilot comes to an end in October 2016 we are evaluating the roles and recruiting our second pair. We are also building on the learning from our Company Producer pilot to develop the next phase of long-term producing support for artists across the city.

Moving forward we want to broker more relationships and opportunities for artists outside the arts sector and identify ways that the sector can be more self-supporting by sharing and distributing knowledge and resources.

Hokes Bluff by Action Hero
(photo: James Stenhouse)





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Create, Capture and Hearlist House meets the performance community of Bristol through their shows
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Help Us Keep This Site
We need your help. We want to maintain this site for the 20,000 people who use it each month, but the technology it is built on needs serious updating. If you use the site please support us with a £3 donation, or whatever you feel able to give as we can't develop it and keep it a free and valuable resource for people who make and love theatre.

What's On

Home What's On Showcase News Directory Jobs Opportunities Classes

Submit an Event
Got a performance event that you want people to know about? It's really easy to list it yourself, and it's free.

Looking Ahead
July

What's On
There's loads going on across our area - if we're missing something why not add it to the site?

Currently showing listings for What's On. Get more results by expanding your search area.

What are you looking for?

Forthcoming Events
The Fabulous Bacon Boys
Following the 10 successes of their previous shows here including One Man and His Cow in the summer of 2014, Living Salt returns to our Factory Theatre...



TB ONLINE



We think of theatrebristol.net as a virtual member of the team, helping connect, advise and promote the work of artists in Bristol.

As well as providing an overview of what is happening in the city, theatrebristol.net is a free non-hierarchical resource for the whole community. Anyone can create a profile, list events, jobs, opportunities and classes. Individual artists and large organisations appear equally alongside each other.

Last year:

Between 700 and 1000+ people visited the site every day. 346 jobs, 432 opportunities and 117 classes were uploaded, and 144 new profiles were created. There were 740 event listings ranging from shows at Bristol Hippodrome to performances at Redcliffe Caves.

We sent our weekly e-bulletin to over 3000 subscribers highlighting content on the site. We used theatrebristol.net to share knowledge and resources ranging from information about artist support and funding guides to links to useful networks, and blogs from artists about their experiences.

The statistics tell us the site is well used but as technology and the needs of the sector change it needs to be updated. We are working on developing a new online platform which will still provide the functions of the current site, while responding to new digital developments and helping us to share the thinking, knowledge, research and learning of both Theatre Bristol and the wider sector.

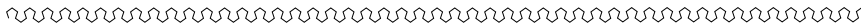
Temple Songs by Jennifer Bell.
(photo: Maria Mochnacz)





BRISTOL DANCE & DANCERS

Bristol is home to some of the UK's most exciting dance artists, but we knew their needs weren't being met.



In true Theatre Bristol style in 2010 we held an Open Space, at which artists demanded dedicated producer support, so in partnership with Bristol City Council we fundraised to make this happen. Emma-Jane Benning worked with us from 2011 to 2015 to champion dance, advise artists, support venues to programme dance, and make connections.

She brought a brilliant energy and commitment to upping the quality and amount of dance in Bristol, developing 26 bespoke artist support relationships and liaising with 25 National Dance Companies which resulted in 8 performances in the city.

Nap Glasses by Kathleen
Downie at Testing Ground
(Photo: Simon Abel)

She established national partnerships including Pavilion Dance South West, NARC, Bath Dance and MOKO, (a strategic touring project for dance performances for children). She ran Testing Ground, a twice yearly platform for work in progress, and supported the Youth Dance Company RISE which was three times selected for the U Dance final.

Building on these foundations and working with our board, Arts Council England, Bristol City Council and regional partners, we are now leading a sector-wide consultation and audit that will drive the next phase of dance development in Bristol. Meanwhile we continue to support initiatives such as Testing Ground, and dance artists can access one-to-one support from our Artist Support Associates.

Nap Glasses by Kathleen
Downie at Testing Ground
(Photo: Simon Abel)



CIRCUS CITY



We are always on the lookout for new cultural leaders and ways to support them.

In 2014 we became Executive Producers for Circus City 2015, holding legal and financial responsibility for the festival while mentoring and developing the two talented festival producers, Lina B Frank and Kate Hartoch.

In October 2015 Circus City took over Bristol and was hugely successful in bringing new audiences to contemporary circus. Over 45 events took place over 3 weeks, including shows, workshops and films. 5,246 people saw shows, and 301 attended other events. Work – including 5 international shows programmed – was presented in 12 venues. Audience feedback was positive with 60% rating shows as excellent, 84% stating they would recommend the show to a friend and 95% would book again to see a show by the company in question.

Planning for Circus City 2017 is already underway.

Vixen, Circus City
(Photo: Joe Clarke)



Circus City Skyline
(Photo: Joe Clarke)

"Theatre Bristol made this festival possible,
gave support and encouragement as well as
practical skills and advice."

- Circus City Producer

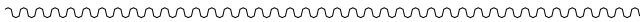




THEATRE BRISTOL
WRITERS



In the context of dwindling print outlets and professional opportunities, we saw a need for interesting, intelligent and passion-driven writing about theatre.



Our first writers in residence, Tom Wainwright and Richard Aslan, created theatrebristolwriters.net as a platform for opinion pieces, responses, reviews, interviews and comment. In 2015 we received funding to continue the project and editor Bella Fortune supported a team of reviewers to develop their writing, while *Circus Diaries* by Katherine Kavanagh were published on the site during *Circus City*.

Critical writing is a vital part of the bigger conversation around theatre, so we will be fundraising to develop these writers' brilliant work and integrate it into the newly developed theatrebristol.net



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MAKING NEW WORK

We try to respond to good and unexpected ideas to make them happen; if it looks like they may not happen we sometimes step in.



We are able to give projects the time they need to develop, because unlike a venue or festival we do not have specific time scale to fit within.

Once Upon A Time by Agnieszka Blonska, performed by 3 circus and dance performers over the age of 65, came to fruition over 3 years. In 2015, supported by Theatre Bristol, it toured nationally receiving excellent audience responses.

Once Upon A Time by
Agnieszka Blonska (Photo:
Steve Tanner)

In 2015 the result of our ever-evolving MAYK co-commission for Mayfest was for an ambitious piece of new work in a non-theatre space. The selected piece, Nikesh Shukla's Salt in The Sugar Jar, dealt with family, food and grief, and ran for 10 sell out performances in a residential house in Totterdown.

Building on the success of the longer commission timescale, 2015's call out asked specifically for work that brought something new, alternative or unfamiliar to how we understand the prevailing social issues of our time. It resulted in the best responses we've ever had, with Selina Thompson's proposal salt. – her re-tracing of the Transatlantic Slave Triangle – being developed over the year.

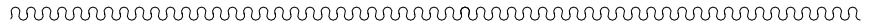
The next big challenge is to raise the scale and ambition of work, so we'll be working with MAYK to design a commission for larger stages for 2018.

Salt in the Sugar by Nikesh Shukla
(Photo: Paul Blakemore)



CONVERSATION

We want to help artists be more resilient by making connections beyond their own art form, geographical region, industry, age, skill set, and background.



For art and artists to thrive, we need a city where more people value, make, participate and make a living from brilliant theatre.

To broaden out the conversation around culture, we ran an Open Space event with Create Gloucestershire at Filton College for everyone interested in how we can all make art more meaningful to more people. The South West Theatre Symposium, run in partnership with Salisbury Playhouse, aimed to celebrate live performance in the south west and to unpick the challenges and opportunities in making art and making a living, and sold out in advance. And we started a series of Open Office events so anyone interested in our work can talk to us and each other.

These events have sparked loads of interesting conversations and ideas which we'll build on over the next year, including an alliance with Create Gloucestershire that supports artists as leaders.

Salt in the Sugar Jar by Nikesh Shukla (Photo: Paul Blakemore)



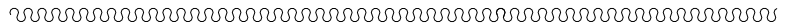
"It was fantastic to work with Theatre Bristol as a partner for the Symposium. Their brilliant ideas, insights, experience in running similar events, their innovation and energy made the event a huge success."

-Salisbury Playhouse



STAFF AND BOARD

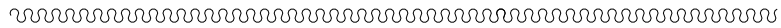
All our staff work part-time and use ongoing outside experience to feed their roles.



Development is vital to keep passion and enthusiasm high, so 2015-16 saw some changes in our core staff. Co-Director Tanuja Amarasuriya began a 12-month sabbatical to pursue her directing practice and Mel Scaffold stepped up to Co-Director role. Simon Day left the organisation after 3 years as Artist Support Producer leaving a brilliant legacy, including redesigning the role: the 2 Artist Support Associates who joined us in these new positions were Lucinka Eisler and Jo Bannon. After 4 years of great work supporting the dance sector Emma-Jane Benning left Theatre Bristol to co-lead Strike A Light Festival in Gloucester.

Paid internships are an important route for people from a range of backgrounds to access creative careers, ensuring a diverse workforce. In 2015-16 we employed two more interns through the Creative Employment Programme. The emerging cultural workers we've supported through this initiative have since taken part in the Watershed Future Producers programme, produced shows in Bristol and Edinburgh, worked at Circomedia and been part of the Soho Writers programme

Nick Sweeting, Producer extraordinaire
at Improbable Theatre, is Chair of our board of
directors, who are currently:



Laila Diallo
Choreographer

Sarah Dickenson
Dramaturg and Project Manager

Jo Hunter
Creative Consultant, Producer and Artist

Katie Keeler
TB Co-Director

Clare Reddington
Creative Director, Watershed

James Stenhouse
Co-Artistic Director, Action Hero



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FINANCE AND FUNDRAISING

Our 2015-16 turnover was £230,576, maintaining a year-end surplus of £11k and reserves of £12k.

Potential cuts to Arts Council England and Bristol City Council funding were not realised and we raised £21k through our Executive Producer role for Circus City, high-level consultancy and producing not provided through our baseline artist support offer.

Being honest about the true cost of our support is important – rather than placing this burden on our core constituency of artists, we need to broaden who we engage with to ensure we are making the right 'ask'. One strategy is the new donate button on our website, which raised £295 this year. We held a small event to say thank you to our donors.

We've been working with a fundraising specialist on a new strategy which will be put into action in 2016. One application was unsuccessful, but we've learned lots about our value and strengths which will support us to develop better relationships over the coming year.



BE INTERESTING
BE INTERESTED
BE OPEN
BE ANGRY
BE PLAYFUL
BE HOPEFUL
BE GENEROUS
BE MODERN
BE BETTER
BE ALIVE
BE CURIOUS



Once Upon A Time by
Agnieszka Blonska (Photo:
Steve Tanner)