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Tues 12 Sept 2023 @ Zoom

### Exploring the Company / Venue Dynamic in PYA

Led by Chris Elwell, Director Half Moon and Katy Snelling, freelance programmer and producer

#### Present (27)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Mosa Tutti Frutti she/her (Co-host, me)      |   |
|  Tutti Frutti wendy (Host)                    |   |
|  Chris Elwell - Half Moon                     |   |
|  Katy Snelling - house theatre                |   |
|  Alison Garratt (she/her), Oily Cart          |   |
|  Anthony Haddon                              |  Sally Chance Dance Australia                       |
|  Cat - Can't Sit Still she/her              |  Sam Dunstan (He/Him)                              |
|  hayley                                     |  Samantha Lane - Little Angel Theatre              |
|  Jane Crawshaw, Barmpot Theatre she/her     |  stevie thompson                                   |
|  Jane McGibbon S&N Theatre (she/her)        |  Tamsin Fessey, Angel Exit Theatre                 |
|  Joseph (The Place)                         |  Tessa Bide Productions - Tessa and Alice          |
|  Kelly Full House She/Her                   |  Tina Williams/ Pied Piper? She/Her                |
|  Liz - Z-arts                               |  Toby Ealden - Zest Theatre (He   Him)             |
|  Natasha - Tell Tale Hearts                 |  Vicky Ireland Action for Children's Arts she/h... |
|  Nathan Curry (Tangled Feet) he/him         |  Zoe - Z-arts                                      |
|  Ruby Thompson - The Herd Theatre (she/her) |   |
|  Maddi Kludje                               |   |

#### Apologies



## **1. Welcome and Updates (Wendy) 10.30am – 10.45am**

Welcome to PYA England Coffee Meeting!

PYA England (Performance for Young Audiences) is the England sub group of [ASSITEJ UK](#), a membership organisation which is part of a global network, [ASSITEJ International](#). The PYA England sub group welcomes its Irish, Welsh and Scottish colleagues to the zoom café's. ASSITEJ UK is a membership organisation and we would be delighted if any people new to this network want to become members. Wendy Harris is chair of PYA England, Kate Cross is ASSITEJ UK Chair. There is information at the end of these minutes about how to become a member.

Wendy's update on PYA activity:

We have created a scoping report, the [executive summary](#) is on the ASSITEJ UK – PYA England website.

Every four years there is a world congress of children's theatre. The next one is Cuba is in May 2024. The next PYA zoom café may have our Cuban colleagues with us. Dates TBC.

Anyone with questions or thoughts please email Wendy directly – [wendy@tutti-frutti.org.uk](mailto:wendy@tutti-frutti.org.uk)

## **2. Chris & Katy 10.39am – 10.55am**

Key Points:

- Chris & Katy run a loose group of programmers or TYP programmers
- What we're hearing from venues is that they're really, have limited capacity at the moment. Programming teams reduced from 1.8 FTE to 1.4 average. Marketing teams There is a shift of 2.4 FTE to 1.8 average. This means don't they have as much resource and time to give to artists.
- Finances are so stretched, funding from local authorities has dropped from something like 85% down to 49%. It's a massive reduction, which means that everyone's stretching their finances and being less risk averse.
- And so what we're hearing particularly through the PYA. The venues is people are going for tried and tested titles and not innovating and putting new work. Which is a worry for everybody actually, even the venues that are doing that because we know we need new ideas, different stories from different places.



- Venues quite often take their work into other spaces such as schools and libraries, to go where their audiences are. Which is an important dynamic. Because it has wider outreach, a wider kind of identification. It can impact on the art you can make because of course some shows can't be presented in non-traditional spaces and so on. Lots of research on outdoor arts and how valuable that is to reach new people in new places. Arts council funding is tightened. Difficult even with a great application but I think they really are responding to the pieces of work that can play those spaces that can be outdoors. How do you keep the doors to your venue open and support staff if actually half the work you're doing, you're doing down the road because that's where your audience is.
- Libraries are crying out to work with arts organisations quite often because they don't necessarily know where to seek. That scary red velvet theatre seats really off putting forward because it doesn't speak to their understanding of what going to a family activity is and actually do we put that work in the library first and grow that audience and hope that there was a trust established but it doesn't happen just the first time so it's I think being in an organization that has the How and the commitment to plan that over a long time, which is when you see reductions in staff, that's really frightening because you lose those people who have built that commitment and understanding up.

*Natasha - Tell Tale Hearts 10:54*

*One of the main reason you get a lot more audiences in libraries is because the work presented there is often free or v low cost to families. Ticket prices is a massive issue for families in the North right now.*

- Flexible pieces that can go into lots of venues can be really good, but that mightn't be the aesthetic choice for the show. But could be good if weather turns to be able to move it to a back up venue. Or there are really sort of special pieces where you can perhaps look at a model where you're having one piece in for a longer period of time and really working with local schools in a in a different way. How do you build that relationship with the school over a long period of time so that you can you can do a sharing for schools audience all week.
- Commercial hits like Room with the Broom bring large audiences and schools. The audience know the story, it is low risk for them and the venue. The audience is reassured. But then once the audience comes and is made familiar to the space, they may then take a risk on something unknown. The big hitters also give good income that can then subsidize the less well-known titles, or even other work that tends to have lower audiences.

*Tessa Bide Productions - Tessa and Alice 10:55*

*Pre-pandemic we were R&D-ing a show about loss and grief for young audiences that we feel would have been perfect programming post-pandemic but we just couldn't get it programmed. We pitched a Julia Donaldson book as an experiment (not the direction our company had ever considered before/been interested in!) and it was snapped up. We are*



*going down that route to sustain ourselves through these difficult times but we would like to get back to making more original/challenging work, and think it's important for the UK PYA scene to stay industry-leading.*

- It is also important to try and support new and different stories, not just fairy tales. There's some great organizations supporting different stories. Like Unicorns program have really had a broad range of titles from around the world and the work that Spark do in Leicester, work with, diverse artists to develop work. Think those initiatives are vital. They're really, really important. Because people don't just spring up overnight fully formed and ready.
- One of the things that comes up at programmers all the time is ages because people's age focus and they say I can get there's there isn't much baby work but I can always get an audience for babies. There is work for 3-7, and then everyone goes oh I'm not going to program stuff for 8 to 12 is too difficult. Also 13+ can be a challenge. Some venues treat YA the same as other audiences. Venues forget that young adults grow up so a mailing list from 4 years ago becomes redundant. We need to follow the audiences age journey and promote relevant activity.

### **3. Breakout Space 10.55am – 11.15am**

What do venues and companies need from each other to make the dynamic successful when presenting work for audiences... try and prioritise on your list as part of this discussion....

### **4. Discussion and Feedback 11.15am – 11.30am**

#### **Room 1**

Changing leaderships & staff make long term relationships harder. Commissioning pots are stretched across more relationships which reduces frequency. They're also not enough to fund a show on its own and the project grant models have shifted - are venues aware that development and touring is now separated?

Shorter, sporadic tours make recruitment of artists harder - how can we keep them employed and loyal?

Where do you find diverse work? What platforms exist to support these that venues and programmers can access?

Free events in library/outdoors attract new audiences but they may never cross over if ticket prices in venues are too expensive. Funding required for subsidy if we really want this



translation. How do we collectively lobby government and arts council England, for more value to arts and education and shift political will?

### Room 2

- Artistic Risk/Commercial Viability - some knottiness around this and questions of value
- Relationships with schools & how this is funded and brokered
- Carrying audiences across childhood and into adulthood
- There is a structure and its really important to acknowledge it collectively. The structure seems like weekend programming; the fact that relationships with schools are broken; and known titles are preferred.
- There's a need for companies to work across both contexts (schools and venues); but its really difficult to broker relationships
- Venues often want to crunch the time and money into the smallest amount; this limits the artistic ambitions of companies
- Two handers, small guarantees, one day nature of the engagement, limited get in / get out
- Adult work can enter the canon, but what are the ways for work for young audience to build excitement and become similar canonical?
- There's a question of value/priority. A general feeling that PYA is less valued?
- Extra resources is really important; its unsustainable at present
- Commercial viability seems key for some venues; but there's loads of challenges to selling and drawing audiences
- Commercial ideas aren't somehow 'less' - there's an opportunity to draw in audiences who aren't regularly theatre goers
- For some reason, young audiences don't make the leap in attending work as younger kids to secondary age. Some young audiences might only see one work in their childhood, and is that OK?
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- Where's the money for schools shows? Schools can't pay

### Room 3

Shows after school time. Special schools and what they need. Week-day performances and performances at different times.

Problem for companies with changing programmers. Timing problems of just weekends and holidays. Important to have lots of conversations with venues about content and materials. Programming at different times/different models. 6pm time. Group 3

### Room 4

More communication between the venues. What kind of shows they are looking for.



Venues working with companies to help them programme. Associate artists helping YA programming.  
Helping Libraries programme.

Co-creation with venues. Working on a longer term basis with 5 venues and their audiences, rather than drop in touring or co creation.

Difficulty of Co-Creation with touring model. How do we sell a show which is co-created to venues further afield?

Can venues communicate more with companies to let them know what work they are looking for, what they want to programme and then companies can make that work or use that as a starting point.

*Natasha - Tell Tale Hearts 11:30*

*Such a shame that the emphasis is always on 'co-creation' when there's such value to inter-activity/interaction that also involves creatively and meaningfully engagement with audiences.*

Companies can help venues to programme. The artists often know a lot of the work that is out there, so if there is a venue that is less confident in programming for Young People they can lean on the companies.

*Jane Crawshaw, Barmpot Theatre she/her 11:31*

*On Tamsin's point above, can the TYP programming group Chris mentioned have a mailing list that artists/companies can join which provides info on work they'd like to programme?*

*Nathan Curry - What we need from venues: clear, quick answers on whether you'll programme it (it stops us chasing) or acknowledgement of timelines at play. Thanks all.*

*Sam Dunstan (He/Him) - The Growth House 11:31*

*Whilst I love the idea of working in non-theatre spaces, having spent most of my career in those spaces I think that's necessary. My worry is a drop in standards or lack of support and artists being expected to do this without proper training in how best to approach these spaces. You can't just put a show in a non-theatre space and adapt the scenes/dramaturgy.*

**Next meeting: Nov (DATE TBC) 10.30am – 11.30am**



### ASSITEJ UK Membership

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE CONNECTED TO OTHER PROFESSIONALS IN YOUR FIELD?

ASSITEJ UK (Performance for Young Audiences UK) is the National Centre of ASSITEJ INTERNATIONAL and is made up of professionals from Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales who make theatre and dance for young audiences.

We celebrate excellence in the performing arts for young audiences, whilst promoting and protecting Performance for Young Audiences (PYA) across the UK, advancing the growth of the industry so that it can enrich and nourish both the artists making the work and young people's experience of the world through live performance.

We promote ASSITEJ opportunities and aim to connect artists in the UK with artists abroad. The pillars of ASSITEJ UK are internationalism, professional development and advocacy.

WHAT DO YOU GET?

- Membership of ASSITEJ UK includes:
- Monthly newsletters packed full of national and international opportunities
- Weekly TYA/PYA job opportunity newsletters (newsletter sent on submission of opportunities by members)
- An invitation and voice at the Assitej UK AGM
- Details of Assitej International Global Gatherings and all other festivals and opportunities world-wide
- Access to sector-wide research and data which can be used in funding applications etc.
- Opportunity to apply for Assitej places at international events
- Discounted passes for events and training where available

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

- Regularly funded organisations – £100 per annum upon completion of an annual survey – [membership form](#)
- Project funded organisations – £35 per annum upon completion of an annual survey – [membership form](#)
- Independent artists – £10 per annum upon completion of an annual survey – [membership form](#)

Independent Artist FAST PAY – Set up your direct debit today in seconds and we will email you our members survey to complete in your own time

If none of these fees apply to you or if you require an invoice, please contact us on [info@tya-uk.org](mailto:info@tya-uk.org) Payment is taken via GoCardless.

DO YOU KNOW?

If you are an organisation, you can also sponsor an independent artist's membership for only £10!

If you are an independent artist, you can approach an organisation to request they sponsor your membership

<https://tya-uk.org/join-1/>