

Stepping Out Theatre
**ANNUAL
REPORT
2010/11**

www.stepsingouttheatre.co.uk

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Fairbairn
FOUNDATION





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Graphic Design by Ann Stiddard

Photography by Jose Navarro, Toby Farrow and Michael Brydon

Reference and Administrative Details

‘Stepping Out Theatre’ is an unincorporated association with aims which are benevolent and philanthropic. We are a registered charity who registered with the Charities Commission in February 2007.

Charity Registration Number; 1117912

The group was formerly sometimes known as **‘Bristol Survivors’ Poetry’**.

The group’s name is sometimes lengthened to **‘Stepping Out Theatre Company’**.

‘Stepping Out Theatre’ was founded in 1997.

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Tim Knight, 12 Carmarthen Road, Henleaze, Bristol BS9 4DO

Structure, Governance and Management

Membership

Membership of Stepping Out Theatre is open to all local mental health service users and their allies with an interest in the work of the group. Involvement in any of our productions or activities confers membership. All members are entitled to attend our Annual General Meeting and vote for the election of a group of Trustees who are responsible for running the group. Copies of the group's constitution with more information on all this are available from the Stepping Out Theatre office.

Governing Document

Constitution, amended and signed prior to Charity Registration 6th October 2006

Governing Body

A Board of Trustees, currently ten in number, elected in accordance with the Constitution at the Annual General Meeting

Staff

Project Co-ordinator (Part time)

Steve Hennessy

Deputy Project Co-ordinator (Part time)

Ann Stiddard

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM for 2010 – 11 was held at 7.30 p.m. on Sunday 1st August 2010 at The Gasworks Studio, Narrowways Road, St. Werburgh's, Bristol. The following ten trustees were elected to serve a period of twelve months or until the next AGM.

Trustees 2010 - 2011

Gill Amphlett – Co-Chair

Pameli Benham – Co-Chair

Anna Harpin – Secretary

Ernie Bell – Treasurer

Alex Boyt – Trustee

Tom Collis – Trustee

Alison Comley – Trustee

Paul Clarke – Trustee

Steve Hennessy – Trustee

Ann Stiddard – Trustee

Trustees are drawn from the existing membership and we try to have a range of people who reflect the nature of the group – i.e. people who have used and / or worked in mental health services and people who work in the arts. Any group member can put themselves forward for, or be nominated to be a Trustee.

Project Co-ordinator's Report

The third year of our five year grant from the Big Lottery Fund was one of the most successful and varied so far for the group, starting with a highly emotional production that was a tribute to group photographer Ian Wilmot, and finishing with our most successful production ever at the Alma Tavern which was the last in the Broadmoor series of plays that started in 2002.

This year also saw a successful application to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation which enabled us to take on a second paid member of staff and expand our core staff hours considerably. During the year our sister group Chrysalis Theatre, who work with drug and alcohol service users, were successful in obtaining a 3 year grant from the Big Lottery Fund. With the greatly increased scope for co – working and co – productions, this put the work of both groups on a much more secure footing for this year and the next two years.

There were 47 applicants for the new post of Deputy Project Co – ordinator and on 26th April, 8 candidates were interviewed. The successful candidate was Ann Stiddard. Ann is a Joint Artistic Director of Theatre West and has been a freelance designer on Stepping Out productions for the last ten years. She started work with us on May 1st and for the first time in its history, the group had two paid members of staff.

We continued our programme of work at Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital, and this is dealt with fully in a separate section.

An increase in our co – productions budget enabled us to mount four productions again this year, for the second year running . Again, one of these was a London production, further raising our profile as a London producer and as a group with a national profile. (See Productions for more details),

The group continues to grow and thrive at the end of what is arguably our most successful and productive year ever. We are in better shape than ever financially, producing more high quality theatre and providing a wider range of theatre – related activities than ever. In particular;

- We continued to offer services to a wide and growing number of mental health service users.
- Following the conclusion of our large scale production, as last year, we offered a new series of regular drama workshops at St. James' Primary School.
- This group, the 'Playing Up' group, later moved to Broadmead Baptist Church and ran throughout the year right up to the start of our next big production – 'Bedlam – The Movie!' in January 2011.
- We ran our first ever dramatherapy group. This was run by Beth Jones, a former drama workshop leader with the group, as part of her dramatherapy training. It was highly successful, and there are plans to repeat it.
- We performed our large scale production 'Waiting for Wilmot' at Fromeside.

- We published an anthology of poetry by L. S. Kimberley, a long term resident at Fromeside.
- We commissioned a new play from local writer Mark Breckon for an ambitious production in 2011.
- Our productions continued to offer an ambitious and diverse range of work.
- We continued to achieve high audiences for these productions (our highest ever for some venues) among people who use and work in mental health services as well as the general public.
- Enthusiastic feedback continued to come back to us from these audiences – as our website and this report demonstrates.

We continue to build up a national profile by productions outside of our home base in Bristol. We are forging new links and audiences as a result of this. In 2010 – 11 we mounted our sixth production in London.

2010 - 11 was our fourth year of operation as a registered charity. This has opened up important new funding possibilities for our work.

Work on 'Bedlam – The Movie!' was well advanced by the end of the year. With a new writer and a new director in place, this is an exciting new departure for the group, and it was shaping up to be one of our most successful productions ever.

Progress on The Aims and Objectives of Stepping Out Theatre 2010/11



Our charitable aims and objectives as set out in our constitution are;

- 1) To relieve the conditions of mental health service users through the medium of theatre.
 - 2) To advance the education of the public about mental health in order to raise their awareness, by producing plays which deal with this issue and counter negative stereotypes of people with mental health problems.
 - 3) To advance the education and training of mental health service users and their allies to develop their creative talents, build supportive networks and produce high quality theatre on mental health themes.
- As the Project Co - ordinator's report makes clear, we can claim to have made considerable progress towards these aims this year.
- 1) Mental health service users have been offered a diverse range of therapeutic creative activities, as well as training bursaries to help with their own creative development. They have also been offered membership of a supportive network and a busy programme of shared activities. We mounted our biggest ever large scale production in 2010.
 - 2) We mounted four productions all of which raised public awareness of mental health issues and challenged negative stereotypes. These plays were performed in front of hundreds of people in Bristol and London.
 - 3) As well as producing four high quality theatre productions on mental health themes, this year's work offered more new education and training opportunities to service users and their allies to build their creative talents in the way we do best – by creating good theatre.

External Evaluation 2007-9

Stepping Out Theatre received its first External Evaluation in 2009 and we made this available online along with all our Annual Reports and Accounts for the last 3 years in 2010. The evaluation was commissioned by NESTA and conducted over a two year period by Prof. Steve Onyett of the University of the West of England. It is a substantial and detailed piece of research involving email and postal questionnaires, in depth interviews and several site visits to Stepping Out events and productions. The Report was published in September 2009 and subsequently submitted to NESTA, the Big Lottery Fund, Lankelly Chase and

The 'Key Messages' of the Evaluation were as follows;

- The work of SOTC is extremely highly valued by those who have made use of the opportunity. Both quantitative and qualitative global ratings of the work of SOTC were extremely positive with respect to both the results and the experience.
- SOTC provides a place where people can participate in the production of something socially valued and useful.
- The work of SOTC is very specifically not aimed to be part of mainstream therapeutic provision, and people's involvement and the way they value the experience is not premised on their identification as mental health service users.
- It is a place where people come to be well, and where they are challenged with support to find new ways of being.
- Participants particularly value the sense of inclusion, working together, friendship, and support to produce something of high quality that gets enthusiastic feedback. The essential joy of participating in a production was highlighted alongside new positive ways of being.
- For some the work underlined everyone's essential vulnerability to mental distress. It challenged some assumptions that people have about people with mental health problems. For example with respect to people's abilities and capabilities. One simply felt better informed about mental distress and the way in which services respond.
- The SOTC work has been a transformative experience for a small group of people in Fromeside, and this has had a positive impact on the wider community. The performance itself was a success.
- The SOTC has achieved effective inclusion of a diverse and well-placed group of people to working together. The approach to achieving this was tenacious and committed. The approach to the work was to be constantly reviewed and the company constantly learning from experience.
- Achieving effective engagement with staff and service users was a major challenge where some progress was achieved. Finding a champion helps sustain the work.
- Other challenges and obstacles with respect to the work tended to be very diverse and personal, such as interpersonal issues within the group, personal concerns about working in secure environments, or problems with travel arrangements.
- Other ideas for working in secure environments highlighted the value of a focussed approach working with one ward, a clear slot to maintain user and staff awareness of opportunities for participation and a "buddy" or "bend" role in the company providing informal psychological support if required.
- The work could be easily replicated by providing a very specific knowledge, skills and experience among those leading the work.
- The positive practices of SOTC could be seen as potentially transferable to a wide range of contexts and could be replicated on a larger scale but not without sufficient and continuous support that would allow long term sustainability and the development of the relationships over time.
- The research team were delighted with the endorsement of our process and our methods provided from the Evaluation. There have been similarly positive responses with the conclusions of Steve Onyett's research has

Productions 2010/11

Waiting for Wilmot

In 2008 the group had to deal with the sad early death of founder member, former Secretary and group photographer Ian Wilmot. In 2010, we mounted our production 'Waiting for Wilmot,' the culmination of a process of workshops and reminiscence work throughout 2009. This ambitious production served as a memorial and a tribute to Ian, and became a way for many people within the group to deal with the difficult feelings left by his passing. It was our biggest production ever with a record breaking 38 people on stage. It was particularly fitting that, as is customary with our large shows, this was a co – production with Chrysalis Theatre. In his lifetime Ian used both mental health and alcohol services.

The production was an enormous success, selling out for several nights during its run at the Brewery Theatre. The Brewery is an ideal venue for our productions, and we immediately made plans to go back there in 2011.



Waiting for Wilmot

Vampire Nights

This small scale double bill paired Conor McPherson's 'St. Nicholas' with 'Love Letters' by local writer Crysse M. who wrote two previous short plays for the group that were performed as part of our 'On The Edge' programme. Both plays shared a similar theme. This production was a co-production with Fallen Angels and Dreamweavers. It was a very successful week's work at the Alma Tavern Theatre and ran for three nights at a new pub in Frome – Upstairs at the



Vampire Nights



Stairway to Heaven

Stairway To Heaven

Set on the side of a pyramid in ancient Egypt, 'Stairway To Heaven' offers a vision of how a feverish religious atmosphere, backbreaking work, horrific accidents, brutality and alcohol might have led to madness five thousand years ago. A young man working on the pyramid has to adapt quickly to a new life in a work gang where intense friendships and hatreds are forged quickly in the desert heat.

This was our second production at the Blue Elephant in Camberwell, and it gained some good reviews and excellent audience feedback. It was a collaboration with Fallen Angel Theatre and our second production working with London producer Simon James Collier.

During the run of 'Stairway To Heaven' we also mounted a rehearsed reading of 'The Demon Box' as part of the 'Vibrant' season at the Finborough Theatre

Venus at Broadmoor

This was the fourth and final play in the 'Lullabies of Broadmoor' quartet that the group has been working on since 2002. It told the story of Christiana Edmunds, 'the Chocolate Cream Poisoner' who was at Broadmoor from 1872 to 1907. The production received excellent reviews and audience feedback, and our highest ever audience figures for an Alma Tavern production. The completion of the Broadmoor series paved the way for an ambitious plan to transfer and mount all four plays together in 2011 – 12.



Venus at Broadmoor



Waiting for Wilmot

Feedback from Audiences

Here is what audience members said about our four productions this year

WAITING FOR WILMOT

... there's theatre and there's theatre from the heart. Theatre that eases and subdues melancholy in the simple moment of celebrating a life that did not go unnoticed, unrecognised or unmarked. In death Ian will never be alone. Thank you all.

The play was excellent. Truly an example of heartfelt compassion, enthusiasm and love demonstrated through the medium of theatre. If only there was more theatre that leaves you so inspired and hopeful about the world we all live in. Thank you for a wonderful time.

Very much enjoyed the performance and thought that the play and the performances of everyone involved utilised the resources of dramatic practice and the literary tradition beautifully. It was poignant, intelligent and utterly engaging.

As ever, a joyous top layer of entertainment, but revealing hidden depths of thought provoking stories and lives.

Another fantastic performance. I saw your very first show and it's great to see the consistent quality and commitment over the last 13 years. Keep on going!

You had me crying and I never met him. Wonderful show. I was really impressed.

Brilliant, a clever, professional and well thought out approach to a difficult subject. Authentically covered both the truth of Ian's life and his relationships with Stepping Out. Thanks.

Really wonderful. Loved all the different elements and the way the cast worked as a team.

Really enjoyed. Well done to all.

Came tonite not knowing what to expect and felt completely inspired by all those passionate, talented people! Theatre should be about smiling, crying and most of all, fun – I've experienced all of this and more – an amazing production of which all who were involved should be proud.

I cried all the way thru and yet I'm uplifted. I feel lots of admiration for you and I feel inspired by you too.

Wonderful, moving, funny, sad and uplifting. Also special because I know some folk in the play and admire their courage in lots of ways.

Absolutely bloody marvellous!

I thought it was a really touching story and that the script was very complex but worked really well. A very inspiring effort.

Waiting for Wilmot



Brilliant. Honest and touching without self indulgence. Wonderfully colourful and massive effort from everyone. Well done.

A mate got tickets and I had absolutely no idea what to expect ... it was extraordinarily beautiful – a tribute worthy of a Hollywood star. Ian must have been a top bloke. Thanks for all the hard work.

Fabulous! Evident that so much hard work was put in to what must have been a very emotional performance! Keep up the good work – for Ian's sake!

An amazing moving tribute to someone I now know to be an amazing man. Touching and fantastic. A few tears welled up in my eyes.

Original. Uplifting. Funny.

Multilayered and multifaceted. Lots of elements woven together very well. I got a moving sense of what Ian was like and his relationships with others.

Moving and emotional, but funny and light hearted. I felt I knew Ian really well, yet in reality I have only seen him as an audience member. I was blown away by all the professionalism and hard work. I really enjoyed it and I'm sure Ian would have. Thanks a bunch.

Hmmmm – loved it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Very uplifting and positive – particularly enjoyed the final musical number.

I am glad I came to see this – really brilliant, touching and fun.

Very moving tribute – you really did Ian proud ... great performances.

A wonderfully uplifting tribute to an incredibly talented man! Congratulations!

Absolutely brilliant. Thanks so much! It was such a well thought out show. I've never met Wilmot, but this show made me feel touched as if I did know him. Thoroughly entertaining. Well done.

Fantastic, witty and very moving.

I came to see this as a visitor to Bristol knowing nothing of the company. I was fascinated and found it a compelling theatre experience. I am in awe of the energy and effort which has gone into such a complicated production and concept.

Once again an absorbing and stimulating evening's theatre ... Beautiful and dramatic dances well integrated ... Honest, brave, compelling, hopeful and triumphant.

A tear to my eye. A laugh for Ian. A great show. Thanks.

Incredibly moving. Thank you.

Enjoyed the show. It had depth and great feeling. I'm sure Ian was looking down and smiling.

That was great – a marvellous group effort. It was a great idea and I was surprised how sad I felt by the end – quite emotionally drained. I imagine a huge amount of work went into this production. Hugely valuable and entertaining.

Cleverly thought out and well executed. Enjoyed the enthusiasm of the cast. Roles were generously spread around. Very colourful indeed.

A wonderful show and a fitting tribute to a complex, creative and talented man.

I felt really moved by the spirit of the play.

What a lovely show – very touching to see a tribute show really engaged with the real, whole person and his many parts. I really liked the way the show did that.

An absolutely phenomenal show. Delving into the depth of everything someone with mental health needs has to endure. Professionally done and expertly executed. But that doesn't feel like an adequate statement to describe the effect this had on me! Thank you.

VAMPIRE NIGHTS

Very, very funny. Great acting. Timing
Both plays were thought provoking.
Set was very good and the
changeover was good too,
completely changed the stage.
Second play was brill. Mesmerising
and how did he remember all those
lines?

I think your theatre company does
outstanding work. Look forward to
seeing you develop further over time.

St. Nicholas – Brilliantly performed
and v. well written. Very absorbing
and brought the story alive. Love
Bites – Atmospheric. Brilliant writing
– liked the way it ended, a bit of a
twist, but a moving twist.

Great actor, brilliant story. The style
and approach reminded me of the
vampire film 'Let The Right One In'.

Fabulous performance!

Dark and different. Typical of
Stepping Out.

Wow, what a performance! One of
the very best shows I have seen at
the Tavern. Excellent.

An exciting and interesting
experience during which I felt a
variety of emotions ranging from
amusement, sadness, hope to anger
and fear.

Really enjoyed both plays. Great set
for Love Bites and loved the
playfulness of the writing. St.
Nicholas was mesmerising and
brilliantly acted. Loved the mix of wit,
despair, eeriness and insight. Brilliant.

Interesting themes and twist to the
vampire myth. Strong main
performance.

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Excellent acting, felt real. Very
emotional performance, really made
me intently interested in the story.
Really felt for Makhthon's distress
and traumas.

Great!

I really enjoyed the play. I thought it
was extremely well written and acted.
I thought the space was used very
well and I loved the setting and
costume design.

I enjoyed the show immensely.
Performance of the actors was
excellent and I was completely
engaged throughout the show. Also
impressed the warm and friendly
atmosphere of the theatre.

I really liked everything about it ...
great!

Very well presented, very enjoyable -
would highly recommend.

I particularly enjoyed Geb's
performance ... full of real truth,
pathos, sensitivity, technical skill and
assurance.

Excellent and inspiring work that stirs
the emotions within a performance
and that resonates beyond the
curtain falling. Fantastic writing and
performances.

A good blend of humour and dark
storyline.

Enjoyed the play very much. Great!

Innovative, thought – provoking and
enigmatic. Well done.

Beautifully written and acted.
Thought provoking – great set. Really
enjoyed it. Very moving.

Excellent – a powerful performance
by all involved – one or two spine
tingling moments. Thanks for an
entertaining and enlightening play.

Very powerful – unusually high quality
of writing.

Really enjoyed it – really convincing,
witty dialogue. Handled the more
challenging scenes in an effective
and non – corny way which I thought
was really skilled. Strong actors all
round.

Stairway to Heaven





Venus at Broadmoor

VENUS AT BROADMOOR

Superbly acted. Brilliantly written. I particularly loved the balance you managed between victim of crime and perpetrator.

Excellent, intense, funny and poignant. Well done! One of the most moving plays I've seen here. Brilliantly acted and a fantastic evening – thanks to all involved.

It was absolutely excellent. Intimate venue, accomplished cast, brilliant script.

Amazing. Stunning. Brilliant. I so enjoyed this play. This is the first play I've seen here and I'm so glad I came. The writer showed a deep understanding of the issues involved and explored them with great sensitivity. I will definitely see more of his work. Fantastic! Brilliant acting as well. Loved the characters.

An utterly amazing play! Enchanting, beguiling, disturbing, with dark, complex currents yet a delightful lightness of touch. The performances were all outstanding, 3 characters each struggling to make sense of themselves and their deepest longings and each settling for a different set of certainties and delusions. That's my first take. Feels like the play will carry on rattling round my head for a long time yet. Brilliant!

Fantastic! A sensitive subject very beautifully portrayed. Thank you.

A beautiful, elegant production from start to finish.

Congratulations to the writer, director and cast. A very absorbing play – brilliantly written, brilliantly acted. Well done!

Amazing! Enthralling. Engaged all the way through. Brilliantly written.

Amazing acting. Learnt so much. Moving. Brilliant.

Brilliant! Great! Marvellous! Very much enjoyed the show.

Fantastic ensemble teamwork mixed with outstanding solo performances. Simple yet beautiful touches in the choreography and set as well as the technical side of the show. Thoroughly enjoyed it and can't wait to see the next.



Waiting for Wilmot

Feedback from Performers

A selection from some of the comments by service users who took part in our productions 2010-11 *

It was like being part of an extended family – a great bunch of misfits and ne'er – do – wells! It validated me. I felt part of something. It let me express myself. I'm a better person for it. It doled out a large dose of laughter medicine. Doctor theatre is a very healing influence on me.

Doing the show was a joy. I felt happy every evening, looking forward to my warm up and helping to build enthusiasm along with everyone else. It was like a prepared terror run. (Scaring yourself is supposed to be good for you apparently). I enjoyed building my character week by week.

It was lovely to work with old friends again and make new ones. I am always full of admiration and awe at the quality and depth of the acting and commitment by everyone involved and the tremendous supportiveness of the group. I felt really happy to be part of the whole show and the team.

The more plays I've done, the better I have got to know the cast. I feel accepted and safe. Felt I would not be able to learn my lines as I had so much going on and my mum passed away during the rehearsals. I wanted to pack it in and run off and cry but I stuck with it and as the saying goes, it was 'all right on the night'. I was very nervous and felt sick, but hey, that's show biz!

As with all Stepping Out activities, I have met and got to know some lovely people, many of whom show great courage and humour in fighting against very tough circumstances.

The play got me back into dancing, and a new sort of dancing, reminding me how much I enjoy it and that I mustn't lose touch with it. It was a real pleasure to work so collaboratively and renew my friendships with the other dancers. They are such lovely, creative, supportive ladies!

Doing the play has made a big difference to me. I have just done a drama course at University which I would never have done if not for Stepping Out.

This has given me something worthwhile to do and to talk to people about.

I found that someone always had an answer for whatever the problem was. It increased my self confidence. I met some lovely, fun people. I was very nervous at first, but increasingly began to relax and enjoy myself as people were so kind, genuine and supportive. I made friends and I learned about working collectively. I loved being part of something genuinely healing that was also fun, fun, fun!

It has been a completely new experience for me. Apart from finding it all very enjoyable, I have gained an understanding of how much work is involved in putting on a production. I found the commitment of all the rehearsals quite hard, but once the play started, I was more relaxed. I didn't feel at all nervous, even on the first night.



It makes a difference to me to be involved with people who genuinely support and care for others and grant them a feeling of importance. It has shown me that Stepping Out consider every member as important, despite how much or little they are involved. In the performances, I felt my confidence becoming greater with each performance.

Being involved in this production has been very creative and rewarding. It has been wonderful to see the group come together and help each other. It allowed me to have wonderful laughs, and to get into a larger – than – life characterisation. It was also very humbling.

I enjoyed being part of the group. I met really nice people and was looking forward to being with them every night. Performing was a relief – such a sense of achievement after all the rehearsals.

Meeting and spending time with everyone has been so much fun and I hadn't laughed like that for a long time. I felt part of something and like I belonged as a member. It gave me time away from other areas of my life that are difficult. I have ME so my energy is always very low and I feel like I miss out on a lot, so I was proud that I attended as this lowered my stress levels, built up my energy, and made me able to get on with other things and have confidence to take on more.

My confidence increased as the show came together. The company is friendly and supportive and a great way to meet people and learn about theatre. You can do as much or as little as you want. It was good to be back on stage.

This production reaffirmed for me the importance drama can have in bringing a group together. This was an ambitious project with lots of people but everyone worked together to help and support each other to get through it and enjoy both the rehearsals and the performances.

Doing this show reminded me how fortunate I am. I loved being onstage in front of an audience. It brought a lump to my throat.

The production gave me the incentive to start dancing again when I had all but given up. I realised how much I had missed it and how rusty and stiff I had become. After a few rehearsals, I was back to my old flexible self!

Felt great to have rehearsals twice a week and be involved in a show. I really loved the whole terrifying experience on stage. It is a really supportive, wonderful group. It blew me away how much energy everyone put in. I felt very humbled by the whole experience.

It stretched me and challenged me because it was a big project and it took a lot of time and energy. Rehearsals were great fun – it was a lovely, happy atmosphere with lots of laughs – a real feeling of camaraderie and shared purpose and I loved it. The performances were nights of adrenalin filled excitement. I loved the buzz, but found it scary and fell off the tightrope a couple of times.

Being involved in this production has made a very big difference to me and my life. I used to think everyone in the world was bad and I never interacted with anyone, but everyone in Stepping Out was very welcoming. They made me feel at ease. I know now that there are decent people out there. I have met them. I can now have a conversation with people I do not know. I am able to get out more. I feel happier in myself. I feel accepted. In rehearsals I felt excited to be part of something so personal to everyone. On stage I felt very nervous, but happy. Happiest I've been in a while. I have always wanted to be back on stage. I felt more myself than I ever had.

** The reader is referred to our website where we post more detailed feedback from performers on our shows going back many years*

Waiting for Wilmot



Reviews

A selection from some of this year's reviews*

VENUE MAGAZINE

VENUS AT BROADMOOR

Steve Hennessy's beautiful, touching tour around the psyche of an infamous Victorian poisoner ... His ninth play for Theatre West finds elegant ways of telling a complex story. Beautifully directed by Chris Loveless, with a simple, atmospheric set and a fine cast of three, 'Venus...' centres on one Christiana Edmunds, a.k.a. the Chocolate Cream Poisoner of 1870s Brighton, and in particular her sojourn in the notorious Broadmoor psychiatric hospital. It follows the shattering effect this fragile, deluded but confidently sexual young woman has on the circumscribed lives of two of the male hospital staff. Via short, powerful two-handers interspersed with storytelling, mime and some nicely late-Victorian vaudeville, Hennessy unravels the complex psychological makeup of this young woman who, bored by her existence at home with her dreams up for herself an er ego – as the goddess of modern incarnation. Along the

way we venture down several fascinating byways – love, sex, loneliness, Oedipal complexes and Victorian England's changing (and unchanging) attitudes to the care of the mentally ill. Most of all, you are left with a sense (made all the more palpable by a mesmeric performance from Violet Ryder as the deluded, fragile but still confidently sexual Christiana) of how the gentle arts of love, sensuality, romance and coquettishness could lighten up the darkness of Britain's most feared lunatic asylum. **** (FOUR STARS)

WAITING FOR WILMOT

A tribute to a dear, deceased friend is a tricky enough subject in it's own right, but 'Waiting For Wilmot' is wildly ambitious in every sense anyway, and you never get the sense it's going to balk at the challenge. Throwing together skits, sketches and monologues in memory of Bristol performance troupe Stepping Out's long - serving photographer and sometime performer Ian Wilmot, the story concerns a journey to the

theatrical underworld where Ian's old characters must be lured up to the stage once more in order to enact a live resurrection. For all the absurdity of the premise, the show managed to strike a balance between levity and solemnity, celebrating Wilmot's life but also giving credence to his darkest moments. And while the play would surely be more affecting for those who knew its absent subject, it still functions as a touching and thought - provoking consideration of the joy and pain in remembering a friend. The second half is better than the first, where the Divine - Comedy - meets - The - Crystal - Maze style quest drives the story forward, and though we know Wilmot isn't going to show up - the play's title and the laws of nature see to that - it's a resonant remembrance all the same. *** (THREE STARS)

* The reader is referred to our website where all reviews of our productions can be seen in full.

THE BRISTOL EVENING POST

VENUS AT BROADMOOR

... An evocative and dark production, theatrical and fluid ... a story told with clarity and tenderness ... strong characters excellently portrayed. Violet Ryder (Christiana) delivered a spellbinding performance as the self proclaimed 'Venus' ... This is not one to miss. 9 / 10

BRISTOL 24/7

VENUS AT BROADMOOR

'Is there a cure for falling in love?' I'm sure we've all got rueful replies to this question, asked by one forlorn character in Steve Hennessy's stellar *Venus at Broadmoor*. The play, showing at the Alma Tavern until Saturday negotiates a startling series of twists and turns in an attempt to understand why notorious nineteenth-century Broadmoor asylum inmate, Christiana Edmonds, had taken to poisoning all and sundry with chocolate creams laced with strychnine.

Caught and locked up in the asylum after killing a four-year-old boy, a doctor and prison attendant set to work to untangle the roots of Christiana's deadly behaviour. Inevitably, rejection in love coupled with childhood abuse go some way towards explaining the actions of the secretive 'chocolate cream poisoner.' That she's charming and capricious undoes all who attempt to help her: the doctor almost pops with frustration when he cannot cure her, while the prison officer falls off the wagon with a desperate thud as he admits to infatuation with Christiana.

Actor Alan Coveney, by turns an assortment of doctors and lovers, manages to be both puritanical and startlingly louche. Violet Ryder, as 'vain and vicious' Christiana, portrays stylised nymphomania with such aplomb that she resembles a silent movie star, albeit one with a suspicion of Babs Windsor hanging about her red feather stole. Steve Hennessy's script, the fourth in his *Lullabies of Broadmoor* series and based on historical fact, is often so



Stairway to Heaven

uncomfortable that watching characters reveal what they'd rather not is like swallowing a porcupine whole. It's also wonderfully funny, a huge chunk of credit for which must go to director Chris Loveless, since many of the guffaws come during slapstick moments without dialogue. A constant refrain of 'nothing happened', uttered by one liar after another following each miserable chapter in Christiana's life, serves to push so many shocking facts far below the surface that we begin to see how even terrible crimes can be born out of despair, loneliness and fear.

BOYZ MAGAZINE

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Set on Cheops' pyramid in 2700 B.C. the intriguing 'Stairway To Heaven' follows four of the thousands of men building the pyramid as they cower beneath the pitiless Egyptian sun. With no women in sight, the men operate under a prison – style praggan system where older men 'protect' the young in return for sex. So when the young and vulnerable new boy Makhthon (James Ronan) arrives, the tough, but tender older worker Geb (played with deadpan humour and touching compassion by Matthew Ward) steps in, even though the cruel gangleader Merab (James French) saw him first.

Makhthon is tired, frightened and sunstroked. And rumours circulate the site; is the pyramid really a stairway to heaven? Or something more sinister? As he crumbles in the brutalising environment, Makhthon undergoes a religious awakening, becoming convinced he is going to heaven with the Pharaoh, Amun Ra, the Sun God, who is expected to visit the pyramid any day.

While it would be wrong to describe the characters in the play as gay, since homosexuality wasn't coined for another 4,600 years or so, playwright Steve Hennessy poses some fascinating questions. Are the men's relationships born from genuine love, or from a desperate clamour for sex and affection in a vicious environment? We are free to speculate, because almost nothing is known about same sex relationships in ancient Egypt.

Beautifully short at just an hour long, and as far from the sex and cynicism in the city that preoccupies most modern plays about men in love, *Stairway To Heaven* is touching, strange and bravely original. **** (4 Stars)

* The reader is referred to our website where all reviews of our productions can be seen in full.

Work at Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital

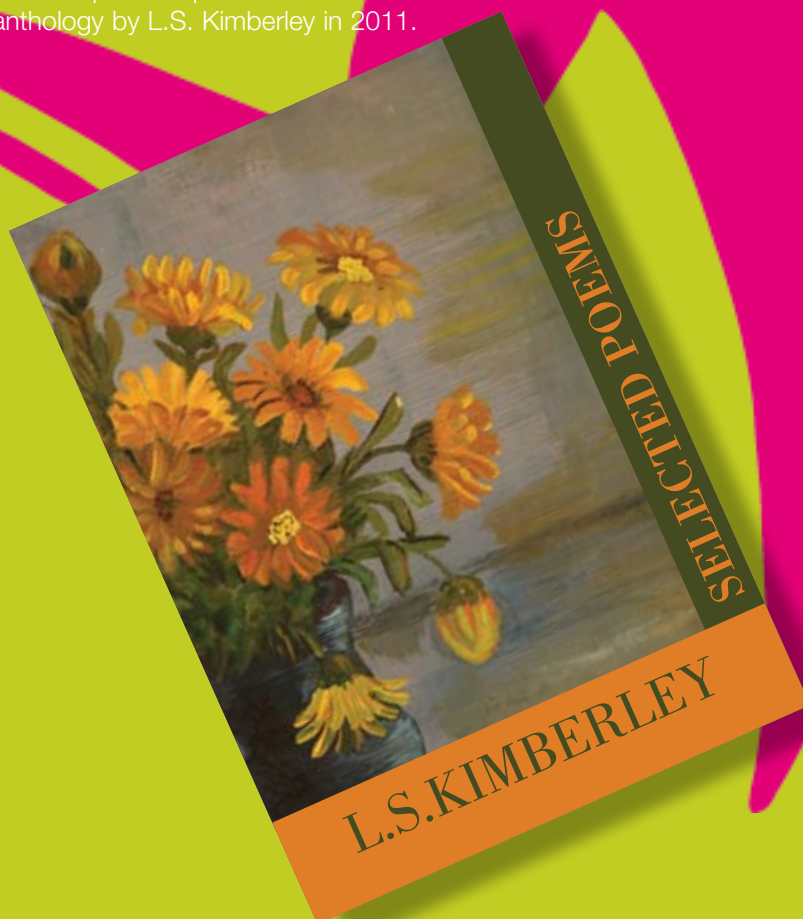
In 2010/ 11 we had to scale back on the busy programme of work we have been running since 2006 at Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital. The main reason for this was changes in the escorting rules at Fromeside that led to service users being unable to leave the wards to take part in Stepping Out activities. Although this did limit the work we were able to do, we were still able to do important work at the Unit.

The first casualty of the new escorting rules was that our programme of monthly drama workshop days had to be stopped as attendances no longer made them viable. In their place we offered other occasional activities and performances.

Unfortunately, attempts to involve Fromeside service users in our large scale production 'Waiting For Wilmot' were also hampered by the new escorting rules. We did however bring this production into Fromeside in April 2010 for one performance where it was well received by a mixed audience of service users and staff.

Later in 2010 we produced a poetry anthology by a Fromeside service user, 'Selected Poems' by L. S. Kimberley (pen name). Copies of the anthology are available from the Stepping Out office. We took part in two days of a 'Celebrating Fromeside' event at which we launched this anthology. We invited two local writers in to support L. S. Kimberley. On each of the two days of the event, we hosted a half hour poetry session for about 40 people – staff, service users and carers.

These sessions were a great success. For the service user concerned, this was the fulfilment of a lifetime's ambition. Sales of the book have gone very well and there are now plans to publish a second anthology by L.S. Kimberley in 2011.



Healing Arts Unlimited

For many years, the group has run a series of trips to the theatre, to listen to music, to visit art exhibitions and to share enjoyment of other creative activities together as a group. These activities are an important part of the service the group offers to its members over the course of the year. They are particularly important during the months after the end of a big production and before the next production gears up. They offer the opportunity for social contact throughout the year. They are a perfect way for people who are interested in joining the group to meet current members. They allow group members to see high quality theatre and other arts events which can inspire and inform our own work. They also allow service users on low incomes and benefits to experience a range of arts activities they might not otherwise be able to afford.

Over the last few years, these trips have become increasingly popular and expensive. Because Stepping Out pays for tickets to events, travel, and occasionally refreshments, the cost can be very high. The bill for one single theatre trip to The Blue Elephant in 2010, attended by 6 people, came to well over £200. We now ask members to make a contribution towards the cost of all trips. This new policy has been very successful, and has raised a considerable sum towards extra social activities, while not resulting in any falling off of demand for the trips.

Trips are now organised by Gill Amphlett our Social Secretary, and this year included one theatre trip to London and a summer trip to Sidmouth. In Sidmouth there was an evening at the theatre and an overnight stay. We ran our usual series of trips to all the productions in the 2010 Theatre West season at the Alma Theatre, as well as several other productions by other companies.



Group trip to Sidmouth

The 'Playing Up' Group

In 2009 we set up a new regular weekly drama group which was run in its first year by Lee Brodie and Beth Jones. It ran successfully for a period of 8 months. Because attendance was high and the group extremely popular, we ran it again in 2010 after our large scale production was finished. This time Jacqui Ham ran the group. The group served as an introduction to Stepping Out for many people and it led up to the start of work on the big new production 'Bedlam – The Movie!' in 2011. The group was suspended when work started on this show in January 2011, but it is planned to restart it after the show finishes.

The Stepping Out Dramatherapy Group

Beth Jones, who formerly ran the 'Playing Up' group is currently completing her dramatherapy training. As part of this, we invited her to run the first ever dramatherapy group that Stepping Out had offered to our members. This group offered members the opportunity for a more structured and formal therapeutic engagement with drama. It ran for twelve weeks in 2010 and was a great success. There are already plans for Beth to run a second group for us in 2011.



Our Website

Throughout 2007 – 11 our website at www.steppingouttheatre.co.uk has been an increasingly important resource for group members, funders and those wishing to find out more about the group. The key to any successful website is regular updating and our website is updated very frequently. During our busiest periods in and around production times, the website is updated daily and at all other times it is rarely updated less than twice a week. The kind of information that can be found there now includes;

- An account of all the work we have done, what we are currently doing and future plans
- Details of all forthcoming social activities and how to access them.

- Rehearsal schedules and performance schedules for productions
- Feedback from audiences while a production is in progress – this is usually added daily
- Feedback from participants in a production once it is over
- Reviews of all our productions past and present, usually posted as soon as they appear in print, and occasionally before
- Feedback from other people using the group including mental health staff who take part in training days run by the company
- Notice of forthcoming meetings and the AGM
- Digests of the group's activities over the previous twelve months and its plans for the coming year
- News of projects and activities with other groups which members of the company are involved in
- News of funding successes

The website is attracting an increasing number of visitors all the time and this has resulted in us being contacted by many more people who are interested in joining the company, by writers whose work deals with mental health themes and by mental health staff who wish to refer clients to our group.

Other Work

Stepping Out Theatre has many members with a wide range of creative interests and an increasing part of our work has been supporting and assisting these people in setting up groups of their own and helping them to raise funding and to further their creative interests with other like-minded individuals.

Over the last few years we have played an active role in helping to set up and support the following groups;

Chrysalis Theatre

Our 'sister' theatre company works with users of HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol services. It was originally set up by Stepping Out group member David Carter with support from Stepping Out Theatre and it now runs a programme of workshops and productions involving service users from its target groups. To date, we have mounted nine co-productions with Chrysalis Theatre, and there are plans for others. Chrysalis Theatre was successful in obtaining its second Big Lottery Fund grant in 2010 ensuring that it will continue to work closely with us on a series of co-productions over the next 3 years.



Mind Your Music

After help with setting up his own group, former Stepping Out Secretary Elliot Hall now runs this thriving mental health music organisation. They offer a very busy programme of workshops and gigs throughout the year in addition to organising concerts, touring and recording CDs. They are just coming to the end of a three year programme of work funded by the Big Lottery Fund, and are currently awaiting the results of a second application to the Big Lottery Fund. They were our main partners in producing a CD of music by Fromeside singer songwriter Jonathan Little, and in 2011 will be our partners again in producing a new CD of all the music used in Stepping Out's stage productions over the last ten years.

Drastic Productions

With support from Stepping Out Theatre, group member Liz Clarke set up her own drama group which has run a series of workshops and drama activities for a diverse range of different groups in and around Bristol including schoolchildren and young people. Drastic Productions recently obtained another Awards for All grant to run burlesque workshops. Stepping Out ran a burlesque workshop and hot tub evening and Stepping Out members took part in other burlesque workshops leading up to a spectacular production at the Brewery Theatre on burlesque themes called 'Dare Devil Divas' in late 2010.

Boil and Bubble

Chair of Stepping Out, Pamela Benham, is currently running this company, with occasional support from Stepping Out Theatre which will increase opportunities for older people to act, direct and write for the theatre.



Dreamweavers

We helped former Stepping Out Treasurer Hazel Stewart to set up this new group which runs a number of different creative projects with people in recovery from illness and traumatic experiences. Dreamweavers has been particularly involved in collaborating with Stepping Out on the work at Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital, and has also been a co-producer of several stage shows with Stepping Out.

Fallen Angel Theatre

We helped Associate Director of Stepping Out Chris Loveless to get funding for his own company, Fallen Angel and they have been regularly co-producing work with Stepping Out ever since both in London and Bristol. Chris directed the highly successful productions of 'Moonshadow' and 'Ray Collins Dies On Stage' in 2009 and 'Stairway To Heaven' in 2010. He will be directing the major new production of all four of our Broadmoor plays in 2011. Our work with Fallen Angel has helped us to build links with Simon James Collier and his Okai Collier Company who have co-produced two London productions with us.

Financial Report and Accounts 2010/11

In the financial year 2010 / 11, the group received a total of £73,339 in income. This was our highest income figure to date, and up considerably from £46,713 in the year 2009/ 10. The main reasons were that this was the first of our three years of funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, and we were also successful in obtaining several smaller grants as well as a grant from the Arts Council towards our production of the four Broadmoor plays which we started work on in this financial year and will finish in 2011 / 12.

The new three year grant of £22k per year from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation upgraded the Development Worker post to Project Co – ordinator and created a second post of Deputy Project Co – ordinator, hugely increasing our core staff hours.

The Lankelly Chase Foundation continued to fund the Project Co – ordinator's costs plus some associated costs of our work at Fromeside Medium Secure Unit at £15,000 per year. This funding lasts up to 2013.

As in previous years, the Project Co - ordinator was responsible for a large number of funding applications. This year, these were primarily aimed at raising the funding needed for the very ambitious production and national tour of the 'Lullabies of Broadmoor' Quartet of plays planned for 2011.

Box office revenues were down slightly this year with small amounts coming in from 'Vampire Nights' and 'Stairway To Heaven'. Co – production and Box Office split agreements meant that we did not receive Box Office revenues from our other two productions. An important new stream of income this year was members' contributions towards the cost of activities. This raised over £1500 for the group and did not result in any fall in attendance for any group activities.

Co – producer's contributions were up substantially this year at £4,326, with the largest contribution from our old partners Chrysalis Theatre with whom we co – produced two of our four shows in 2010 / 11.

As usual, most of our income went on salaries and to fund the four productions with their ambitious performance and touring schedules (see Productions).

For the previous two years, we had ended the year with income and expenditure closely matched, and small paper deficits in both years. The Trustees decided that as the group continued to expand, it was important to start building up a small amount of reserves. At a Trustee meeting early in 2010, they set a goal of building up unrestricted reserves of £5,000 of our income over the year 2010 / 11. We came very close to this target by ending the year with unrestricted reserves of £4,104. Our full reserves policy is set out below.

Stepping Out Theatre - Reserves Policy

'Reserves' or 'free reserves' is the term generally used to describe that part of a charity's income that is freely available for its general purposes. Reserves are therefore the resources the charity has or can make available to spend, for any or all of the charity's purposes, once it has met its commitments and covered its planned expenditure.

Restricted funds cannot form part of Stepping Out Theatre's reserves as the spending of these funds is laid down in the funding applications and signed contracts upon which they were granted. For this reason, although restricted funds may be carried across at the end of an accounting year, they do not constitute free reserves.

It is the policy of Stepping Out Theatre that any unrestricted income which the charity is in possession of may, at the discretion of the Trustees, be spent in any way which advances the causes of the charity. These free reserves may also be carried over between accounting years, for example when the group is trying to build up reserves in order to finance

a large production. Building up of reserves is sometimes a prudent measure, but should not be seen as an end in itself, and for this reason, it is Stepping Out Theatre's policy to have reserves set at a maximum of half of the charity's annual income.

In practice in previous years, Stepping Out Theatre has never generally carried anything substantial by way of reserves. The Trustees increasingly recognise that, as the group grows in size, it is prudent for us to do so and the process of building up our unrestricted reserves was begun in earnest in the financial year 2010 – 11 as outlined above.

It is the policy of Stepping Out Theatre that any unrestricted income which the charity is in possession of may, at the discretion of the Trustees, be spent in any way which advances the causes of the charity. These free reserves may also be carried over between accounting years, for example when the group is trying to build up reserves in order to finance a large production. Building up of reserves is sometimes a prudent measure, but should not be seen as an end in itself, and for this reason, it is Stepping Out Theatre's policy to have reserves set at a maximum of half of the charity's annual income.

In practice, Stepping Out Theatre has never carried anything substantial by way of reserves over from previous years, although the Trustees increasingly recognise that, as the group grows in size, it would probably be prudent for us to do so. The matter is due for discussion at the first Trustee meeting in 2010/11.

Receipts and Payments Accounts, Stepping Out Theatre Company 1st March 2010 - 28th February 2011

Section A - Receipts and Payments

Receipts (Restricted)	Restricted	Unrestricted	TOTALS 2010/11	TOTALS 2009/10
Lankelly Chase Grant (1)	£15,000		£15,000	£15,000
NESTA Grant	£0		£0	£2,000
Big Lottery Fund Grant (2)	£15,914		£15,914	£15,450
Awards for All	£0		£0	£10,000
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (3)	£22,084		£22,084	£0
Arts Council Grant for the Arts (4)	£9,000		£9,000	£0
Receipts (Unrestricted)				
Contributions to Co-Production Costs - Dreamweavers (5)		£158	£158	£100
Contributions to Co-Production Costs - Fallen Angel (5)		£723	£723	£1,000
Contributions to Co-Production Costs - Chrysalis Theatre (5)		£3,245	£3,245	£0
Contributions to Co-Production Costs - Mind Your Music (5)		£200	£200	£0
Payments for Performance		£0	£0	£200
Small Mental Health Grants		£1,000	£1,000	£1,000
Box Office Receipts (6)		£1,653	£1,653	£1,954
Interest		£14	£14	£9
Members' Contributions (7)		£1,541	£1,541	£0
Refunds and Miscellaneous		£2,808	£2,808	£0
TOTAL RECEIPTS	£61,998	£11,341	£73,339	£46,713

(continued)



Section A - Receipts and Payments (continued)

Payments	Restricted	Unrestricted	TOTALS 2009/10	TOTALS 2008/9
Salaries, National Insurance & Pensions (7)	£30,894	£0	£30,894	£14,396
Rent (incl. Theatre Hire)	£4,623	£0	£4,623	£4,034
General Running Expenses	£3,769	£0	£3,769	£1,908
Miscellaneous Production Costs	£3,645	£934	£4,579	£2,189
Training	£2,122	£189	£2,311	£2,227
Travel for Staff and Volunteers	£2,122	£1,358	£3,480	£4,754
Subsistence	£0	£1,751	£1,751	£1,129
Promotional Materials	£1,164	£0	£1,164	£1,145
Theatre Trips		£859	£859	£718
Charitable Donations		£20	£20	£1,358
Workshop Leader Fees	£440	£0	£440	£1,715
Freelance Workers and Artists	£8,956	£440	£9,396	£12,869
Co-Producers' Contribution - Partisan Theatre	£0	£1,200	£1,200	£0
TOTAL REVENUE PAYMENTS	£57,735	£6,751	£64,485	£48,443
Fixed Asset Purchases (9)	£0	£487	£487	£150
TOTAL PAYMENTS (See notes to Accounts)	£57,735	£7,238	£64,971	£48,593
Net of Receipts / Payments	£4,263	£4,104	£8,367	-£1,880
Cash funds last year end	-£1,634	£0	-£1,634	£10,020
Cash funds at year end (28th February)	£2,629	£4,104	£6,733	-£1,634

Section B - Statement of Assets & Liabilities at end of period (See Notes to Accounts)

Cash Funds (10)	£2,629	£4,104	£6,733	-£1,634
Other Monetary Assets	£0	£0	£0	£0
Investment Assets	£0	£0	£0	£0
Assets Retained for Charity's Own Use (11)	£0	£1,788	£1,788	£1,301
Liabilities	£0	£0	£0	-£1,227
NET ASSETS	£2,629	£5,892	£8,521	-£1,559

Signed : Pameli Benham (Chair)

Tim Knight (Independent Examiner)

Treasurer's Notes

- 1) Funds received from the Lankelly Chase Foundation were treated as a restricted fund used only for the purposes stated in the original grant application. I.e. Employing a Project Co - Ordinators and associated costs of developing the work of the group, in particular in relation to Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital.
- 2) Funds received from the Big Lottery Fund were treated as a restricted fund used only for the purposes stated in the original grant application. I.e. Funding productions and core work.
- 3) Funds received from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation were treated as a restricted fund used only for the purposes stated in the original grant application. I.e. Recruitment and salary costs for paid workers.
- 4) Funds received from The Arts Council were treated as a restricted fund used only for the purposes stated in the original grant application. I.e. Paying for work on the production of plays in the 'Lullabies of Broadmoor' sequence in 2010-11.
- 5) Co-producer's contribution to various productions given in the form of unrestricted income.
- 6) Box Office revenue from productions of 'Vampire Nights' and 'Stairway to Heaven'.
- 7) Members' contributions towards costs of social and drama activities.
- 8) Salary, pension and NI Costs of Project Co-ordinator and Deputy Project Co-ordinator.
- 9) Purchase of smoke machine and laptop computer from unreserved funds.
- 10) Financial Assets consist of;
 - a) Restricted income carried forward is Arts Council grant towards production of 'Lullabies.'
 - b) Unrestricted reserves of £4,104 built up over the year.
- 11) Non-financial assets as at 28.2.11.

