

Annual Report 2012-13

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STEPPING OUT THEATRE

Lankelly
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Esmée
Fairbairn
FOUNDATION



LOTTERY FUNDED



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



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“The work Stepping Out Theatre is doing should be supported by all interested in a society that is healthy. Stepping Out understands and does not shy away from the possibility that theatre, the ancient art of these islands North West of Europe, is a transformative and healing activity which brings joy into people's lives. If you want to hear something true, go and hear what Stepping Out Theatre are saying. I only found myself in theatre, and I hear that Stepping Out is helping other people do the same. I have great hopes for this company and deep respect for what they are doing right now.

Mark Rylance, Patron

”



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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.

Principle Charity Office:

19 Webb Court, Park Road, Shirehampton, Bristol BS11 0FH
Tel. 0117 279 7141/ 07790 980688

Bankers:

Co-operative Bank, P.O. Box 250, Skelmersdale, WN8 6WT

Independent Examiner of Accounts:

Beverley Jackson, 220 New Cheltenham Road, Kingswood, S. Glos. BS15 4RB.

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 2012/13 was held at 7.00 p.m. on 23rd July 2012 at the Hen and Chicken, North St. Bedminster, Bristol. The following ten trustees were elected to serve a period of twelve months or until the next AGM.

Trustees 2012 - 2013

Gill Amphlett – Co - Chair
Alison Comley – Co - Chair
Mark Breckon – Treasurer
Louise Lordan – Secretary
Tom Collis – Trustee
Jasmine Darke – Trustee
Sue Hall – Trustee
Kirsty Cox – Trustee
Emma Staddon – Trustee
Paul Clarke – 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



Gill Amphlett (1955 – 2012)

Among other things, the year 2012 will be remembered chiefly for the very sad early death of Stepping Out Social Secretary Gill Amphlett.

Gill had been a key and very active group member for ten years. She had appeared in all of the group’s productions since 2003, was a trustee since 2007, and Social Secretary since 2009. As the

organiser of countless social events and a regular face at every Stepping Out meeting and activity over the years, Gill was one of the best known and best loved group members. Gill’s family described Stepping Out Theatre as ‘her lifeline and her life,’ and she will be sadly missed by all her many friends in Stepping Out. Our new big production for 2013 is dedicated to Gill and offers group members the opportunity to remember her and take part in a project that will be a tribute to her personally, and to all the work she did for the group.

2011 had been the most insanely busy year for the group when we mounted our most ambitious project ever – a new production of all four of the Broadmoor plays which toured to five cities over a twelve week period and notched up a staggering 144 individual performances. By contrast, 2012, the final year of our five year grant from the Big Lottery Fund saw the group return to a more normal workload.

The year started with our second commission for a full length play from Mark Breckon for 2012, ‘ Madhampton.co.uk’. The year finished with our third commission from him for a third full length play for 2013, ‘Hermione Steel and the Island of Lost Minds’.

This year also saw a successful new application to the Big Lottery Fund for three year core funding. This funding will secure the two core workers’ posts and puts the work of the group on a secure footing up to February 2016.

All of our productions this year were undertaken with our sister group Chrysalis Theatre, who work with drug and alcohol service users, and who are now in the 3rd year of a 3 year grant from the Big Lottery Fund. The two groups worked as closely together as ever in 2012 – 13.

The group continues to grow and thrive at the end of another successful and productive year. The group mounted four productions this year, including one in London and once again, our budget reflected the very large amount of work we did in 2012 – 13. Another successful year of fundraising with the help of the Big Give means that we are in better shape than ever financially, and are continuing to produce a large amount of high quality theatre and provide a wider range of theatre – related activities. In particular;

- We continued to offer services to a wide and growing number of mental health service users.
- Following its success over the last two years, Beth Jones, a former drama workshop leader with the group ran two more dramatherapy groups this year. Once again, these groups were highly successful.
- We mounted 8 performances of our large scale production ‘Madhampton.co.uk!’ at The Brewery Theatre.
- We published a second anthology of poetry by L. S. Kimberley, a long term resident at Fromeside Clinic and started work with another Fromeside resident towards publication of a new anthology of his poems.
- We helped group member Kehinde Obileye cover some of the costs of her second anthology of poetry.
- In late 2011, Mark Rylance became the Patron of the group and in late 2012 we mounted our largest and most ambitious ever theatre trip taking 30 people to see Mark perform in the West End in ‘Twelfth Night.’
- We commissioned another new full length play from Mark Breckon for an ambitious production in 2013.
- We continued to achieve good audiences for our productions 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.

2012 - 13 was our sixth year of operation as a registered charity. Being a charity continues to open up important new funding possibilities for our work.

Work on Hermione Steel and the Island of Lost Minds was well advanced by the end of the year. The play is the third in Mark Breckon’s ‘Bedlam’ trilogy and a sequel to the previous year’s Madhampton.co.uk! with a similar large cast.

Progress on The Aims and Objectives of Stepping Out Theatre 2012/13

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 most ambitious ever touring production in 2011.
- 2) We mounted four productions this year, 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, Frome 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

The most recent External Evaluation of Stepping Out Theatre is now available online at our website along with all our Annual Reports and Accounts for the last 6 years. 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 submitted to NESTA, the Big Lottery Fund, Lankelly Chase and other funders You can read and download a copy of this Report by clicking on the appropriate link on our website.

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 a high quality, socially valued production.
- The work of SOTC is very specifically not aiming 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 had about people with mental health problems, for example with respect to people's abilities and confidence. Other simply felt better informed about mental distress and the ways in which services respond.

- The SOTC has achieved a transformative experience for a small group of service users in Fromeside, and was felt to have some impact on the organisational culture. The performance itself was judged a great success.
- The success of the work was achieved through effective leadership, social support and effective inclusion, a diverse company of people with various abilities and skills, and a flexible, diverse and well-paced approach to working together. It required a tenacious and committed approach to achieving long term input to a site and regular contact. The approach to the work needed to be constantly reviewed so that the company constantly learned from experience.
- Achieving effective engagement with staff and thus with service users was a major challenge, where some progress was achieved. Finding an internal champion helps significantly.
- 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 or time.
- Other ideas for work in secure environments highlighted the value of a focussed approach working with one ward, a regular slot to maintain user and staff awareness of opportunities for participation and a "watchful friend" role in the company providing informal psychological support if required.
- It would not be easily replicated without achieving a very specific range of knowledge, skills and experience among those leading the work.
- The positive practices of SOTC were seen as potentially transferable to a wide range of different contexts and could be achieved on a bigger scale but not without sufficient and continuous funding that would allow long term interventions and the development of effective relationships over time.
- The group were delighted with the ringing endorsement of our effectiveness and our methods that emerged from this Evaluation. Funders have been similarly impressed with the conclusions that Steve Onyett's research has come to.

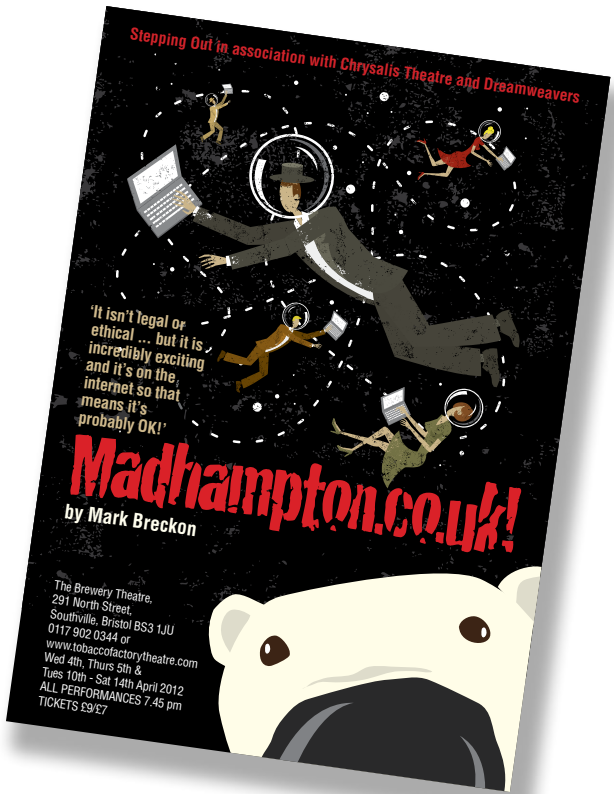
Productions 2012-13

Madhampton.co.uk!

'It isn't legal or ethical... But it is incredibly exciting and it's on the internet so that means it's probably OK!'

A group of online friends meet through 'second-life' therapy site madhampton.co.uk., a slightly scary therapeutic community ... Madhampton is a virtual English village with an array of larger-than-life characters. It appears to offer sanctuary for troubled minds but when they meet for real the friends discover it is more complicated than that .The friends must decide whether Madhampton is a healing place or a sinister cult, and how far they are prepared to go to escape their painful realities ...

After producing his play 'Ray Collins Dies On Stage' in 2009, and 'Bedlam – The Movie!' in 2011, the group commissioned Mark Breckon to write a second new full length play for us in 2012. 'Madhampton.co.uk' was a sequel to the previous year's play and was to become the central play in Mark's 'Bedlam' trilogy. The resulting script was produced at the Brewery in April 2012 where it had 8 performances. This was our third large scale production at the Brewery and was a great success (see 'Reviews' and 'Audience Feedback'). It was jointly directed by Cheryl Douglas and Steve Hennessy. Two nights of the run sold out.



Mascara

'Leonie, sweetheart, I'm really not finding it erotic to be identified with a crazy, dead child abuser ...'

When kidnap victim Natascha Kampusch walked out of Wolfgang Priklopil's life and into a media frenzy the story she told was not the one the world wanted to hear. She refused to condemn her captor and even wept at his grave. And now a young journalist is researching the notorious Austrian kidnap case. As her obsession grows, it reveals a frightening web of connections with her own life ...

Flaming Crackers!

After a highly successful first collaboration with Nevertheless Productions in July 2012, Stepping Out Theatre were delighted to be collaborating with Nevertheless for a second time to present this special follow up Xmas event in Frome and Bristol in December 2012. As part of our long term commitment to help develop new writing for stage, we worked with a group of local writers who were new or new - ish to the genre ...

Seven local writers stared into a candle and thought about Christmas. The result was seven brand new ten minute scripts with a festive twist. Billed as

Light and dark, funny and touching, strange and surprising - a seasonal smorgasbord with a difference, these script in hand performances by local actors including Associate Artist Olivia Dennis, were directed by Stepping Out Associate Director Chris Loveless.

Five Kinds of Silence

Winner; UK Writer's Guild - Best Original Play
Winner; Sony Award – Best Original Drama

Incest. Madness. Murder.

Shelagh Stephenson's terrifying story of the implosion of a family ran for three weeks at the White Bear in Kennington receiving excellent reviews and, as usual, superb audience feedback. The production again featured Associate Artist Olivia Dennis in a leading role and Associate Director Chris Loveless once again directed.



Feedback from Audiences

*** Here is a selection of what audience members said about three of our four productions in 2012 – 13. You can read all the feedback on our website.**

MADHAMPTON.CO.UK!

Loved it – wilder, weirder and whackier than ever, but still weaving in brilliantly sharp observations on mental health, psychiatry, identity, technology and the childlike nature of the Coalition! Haven't laughed so much at anything in ages. Fabulous, mad delight!

Excellent – very entertaining, slick production – pity it's not running for longer – deserves to be seen by a larger audience!

Brilliant show – loved the way everyone stayed in character throughout! Polar Bear, French man and professor were hilarious!

We have so enjoyed tonight – VERY funny. So much hard work has gone into this very interesting, colourful performance.

Wonderful! I haven't laughed so much for a long time.

Really, really great show – good energy. Loved the usual lunacy, but felt coherent, political and clever too.

Absolutely brilliant from beginning to end. Well done, I really enjoyed myself.

Very enjoyable! Lively, thought provoking. Great finale!

An original play. Very entertaining. A great, alternative Saturday night out! Good cast, staging and musical production!

Fabulous show. Enjoyed every minute. All the characters were fab – great performances by all, especially Evil Amy, Diane Deficit, Hermione and Purrdita. Loved the naked dancing! Also loved the shunting scene with Jenny and the Professor! Thank you Stepping Out.

Brilliant! A fantastic performance with great acting and fabulous costumes. Incredible plot and story! Mark Breckon is a very clever writer.

Fabulous, and a bit mental, which is a good thing.

Really enjoyed this very innovative and ambitious production. Well done all!

Wonderful. So many ideas wrapped in a glittery package.

My fave was the cat. Soooooo cute! I thought it was brill and nice to see you all again. One of your best.

I saw your Madhampton production on Tuesday and was really impressed. I was amazed by the sheer scale of the production (both in terms of the script and the size of the cast) as well as the sheer quality of acting which to me, all added up to be a very professional production.

Congratulations on such a fantastic performance.

Thank you, really enjoyable! Visually strong and very together. Powerful messages in a fun setting.

Really loved it! Love that you have a proper ensemble cast and that everyone gets a chance to shine. Was the least confusing plot I've seen Stepping Out do! ;)

Really fast moving, entertaining play. The whole thing looked great visually – well done Cheryl! Li Sah's best role, and TJ a glorious prat! Tom – great to see how you've come on over the last few years. Loved it. Well done Stepping Out. Suzie is a funky dancer!

Loving it – really loving it. Particularly loved the groovy villagers – 3 cheers dudes!

Great fun. Thank you! And lovely costumes too!

First half brilliant! Exploring serious issues creatively. 2nd half not quite as tight, but overall, terrific!

My first time! I had to THINK! Interesting and curious ... multi – faceted, thoughtful, full of issues and unresolved feelings and thoughts. Wow!

Very enjoyable and lively.



thought it was great. Very funny – especially liked Paul the Polar Bear. Really good ensemble piece as you managed to include a large number of people in an engaging and entertaining production. Clearly lots of passion and enjoyment from all involved.

Very good. Interesting plot! Taking the internet down, what a great idea, then people might meet each other face to face! Very good acting and fabulous costumes.

I did fall in love with some characters ... Thank you T. J. Davies, you are unique. Katy – you have such bloody energy, you're amazing! Kirsty, I was completely hypnotised by you. Mark, the more I see of you the more impressed I am. And Tom Jones, the sexy dancer was hilarious!

write to you, guiltily from my online persona, but certainly in love ... We had to dash off after the show this evening, but enjoyed it enormously, thank you so much for the invitation. It was both the most fun and the most meaningful play that I've seen in a really long time. Congratulations to everyone at Stepping Out.

Yet again, Stepping Out hit the right spot. All the characters were fab, especially evil Amy, Gandalfburger, the soldiers and the polar bear. Wouldn't fancy meeting him down a dark alley. Felt sorry for Claire with what Geoff put her through.

I loved the sense of community and feeling of ensemble, all the familiar faces and the warmth from the cast.

Another highly enjoyable and entertaining show. The quality of both performance and production gets better each year! A wonderful and valuable run of shows. Also, I am from the family of a cast member, and I know what a huge amount they get from doing these shows.

Exploration of contemporary issues was really thoughtfully done and the dance was best one yet!

What a marvellous show! I enjoyed the clever twists in the story which as well as being hilariously funny was often very moving - real truths about human needs behind the virtual lures. The whole piece looked stunning - lovely costumes and great choreography. I enjoyed all the performances too, and the sense of exuberance and enjoyment from everyone - it was contagious and sent everyone out smiling and humming the hits.

An amazing show. Funny, poignant, with profound insights. Well acted, directed, produced. Loved finale. Congratulations!

A great mix of music and dance, and good to see everyone get the chance to shine.

Didn't fully understand it, but very enjoyable as the cast obviously enjoyed themselves a lot!! Good to see members of my family fulfilled.

A great achievement to get people involved in theatre and expressing themselves.

An amazing and professional production. It was good to see a few familiar faces. I loved the story and the message / moral.

Really good and great directing. I also loved the costumes.

Extremely moving. I think the ideas are thought provoking, and it was lots of fun to watch. Wonderful!

Weirdly wonderful and thoroughly entertaining. Thanks very much. Katy Muir is my hero!

Entertaining and thought provoking. The French guy was brilliant!!! As was the American girl in the blue. Very original and LOVED it!

I thought it was very entertaining. Lots of funny moments and would love to see it again. Thank you.

Katy Muir stole the show!

Wonderful sense of energy and purpose. Cast and audience all seemed to be enjoying themselves Thanks very much.

Full of energy and verve. Full of interesting ideas and some really funny comic coments. A good evening's entertainment – thanks!

Lots of energy and clearly very well rehearsed. Real sense of ensemble playing.

Absolutely brilliant!

The production was full of energy, everybody very happy. It was a real pleasure to see. Thanks to ALL the actors!

Brilliant – particularly first half!

Excellent script and dialogue ... really good laughs and humour ... good performances by all ... great leadership ... will look forward to the next instalment of your special company.

Understood this year better than last year. Understood it all and thought it well portrayed. Too much gratuitous swearing – not needed to get points across! Liked the 'coalition' boys.

Fantastic! Totally loved it, and absorbed. I think I have seen them all and this was the best – what an imagination White Lightning has got. Very funny.

Very obviously a lot of energy and enthusiasm!! Good fun – some really good actors and budding talents. Must have been so enjoyable to rehearse AND perform. Well done!

Brilliant – the maddest one yet!

So amazing – a great achievement, well done everyone!

How did you remember all those lines? And the choreography was brilliant.

Very good show indeed.

We thought it was gert good. Made us laugh till we cried. Worth coming out on a wet Friday for!

A mind bending experience! Well done everyone.

I thought the show was very funny. A bit complicated at the beginning, but liked how well the actors got into their roles.

You always make me laugh! I love the energy and imagination and the enthusiasm of all the cast. AND I think about it all for a long time after.

Very entertaining – amazing talents, many and various among the cast. Thank you.

I really enjoyed this – it was imaginative and original and funny and thought provoking and well performed. When is the next one?

A cacophony of complete coming togetherness and infectious entertainment once again!

Really enjoyed the show ... It is always refreshing to experience original theatre that does not follow a formula ...

Excellent – fun, witty, moving and original.

Excellent! Very thought provoking. Completely absorbing – very good music / dance too.

Exuberant, entertaining and thought provoking. Well done to all.

Really lively, fast moving, funny, poignant. Brilliant ending with song from 'Hair'. Costumes convincing, eye make up fantastic. A great performance!!

Really enjoyed it and loved the music and dancing.

Excellent. Entertaining and thought provoking. Would like to see more like this!

MASCARA

Fascinating, thought-provoking – a terrific production and powerful performances. I found it a moving and emotionally-charged experience. Many thanks.

Powerful, educational, amazing drama, loved the disco scene. Acting fantastic. Moving.

Fantastic performance. Well written play. Well directed. A show that should be should be shown again, perhaps even afar. Congratulations, a fab show.

Best play I've seen in a long time. Multi-layered and textured. Loved the way built up tension in small space - much like a cell + the explosion at end. Much to think about. All that one would hope from a play.

Highly engrossing. Beautifully subtle and sensitive writing – intriguing and challenging subject matter, adapted and implemented with intelligence and skill. The concept of the two abusive relationships offering parallels made for an original and fascinating evening. Imaginative ways found to relate some of the factual info about Natascha Kampusch, and welcome moments of humour. Strong performances and perceptive, well-judged direction with a visually arresting set. Could possibly stand to be trimmed by between 5 and 10 minutes, but was never boring. Deserves another outing in the future.

I thought it provided an extremely interesting and positively challenging vehicle for exploring the multitude of personal and social issues involved in the many relationships portrayed. Excellent. Thankyou.

This was certainly thought provoking. It was interesting to see the two polarised arguments reflecting society's different stands. Has made me want to read the book.

Wow! Very powerful duet. The clubbing scene was hilarious and the end really packed a punch. Well done both of you. The changing character of Livvy was particularly impressive.

Enjoyed it! Interesting take on unauthorised adaptation! I want to know how the story ends. Well done all!

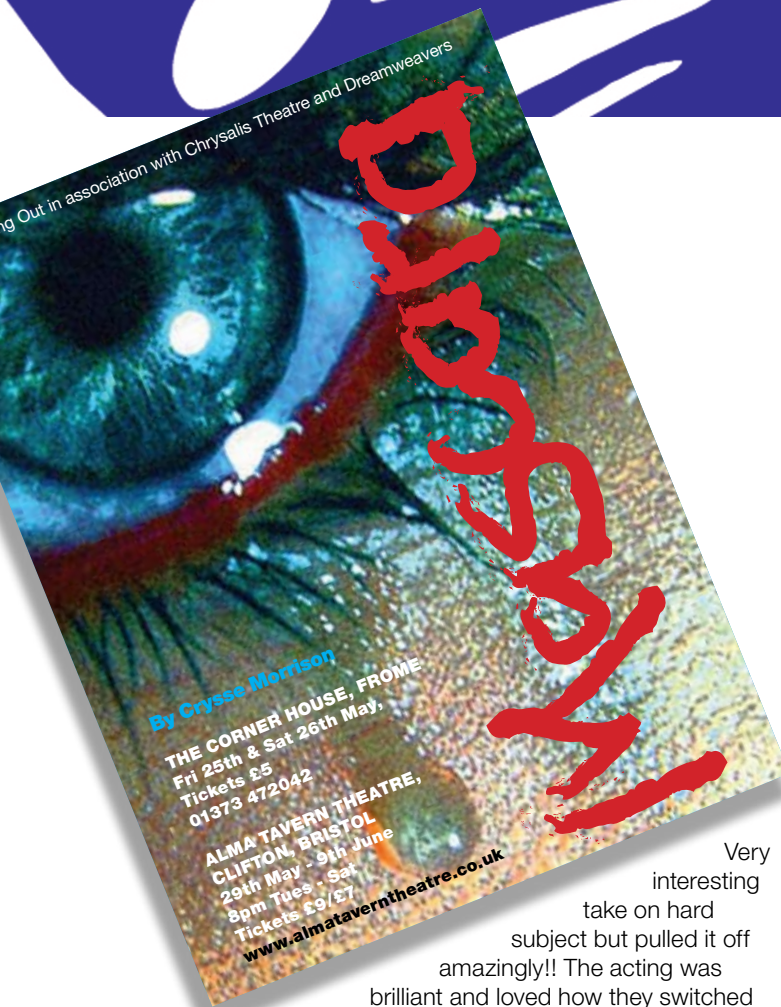
Really enjoyed the show and interesting theme of childhood development and human need.

Well acted. Clever shifts in tempo to keep the pace going. Clever mirroring of relationships in current and historic contexts. Showed how literature and media interprets and leads the reader.

A very impressive performance all round: a well crafted and thought-provoking script, a superbly directed Mise-en-scène and wonderful acting – Olivia particularly subtle and one to watch.



Mascara



Very interesting take on hard subject but pulled it off amazingly!! The acting was brilliant and loved how they switched between the characters really brought to another level and was original. It has a very human understanding in their relationship which did make you unsure of Leonie's+Ralph similarity to Natasha's+Priklopil.

Was very interesting enjoyable to watch. Congratulations, big fan of the company! Keep up the good work!!

Very well staged and acted, with an original and exciting script – hugely enjoyable evening, can't wait for more of the same! Well done all round! Dynamic performances and directing.

WOW! You were right Steve! Very emotional. Loved the club scene! Oliver wow! I was abused by my ex for years and that scene brought it all back. So well done really convincing. Livvy very emotional believable I really related to your character being a child of abuse myself. Well done Stepping Out!

GREAT! ENTERTAINING, PROFESSIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, ABSORBING, SURPRISING, TERRIFIC

Even though I cried I thought the acting was superb and the writing of the script very clever and the twist brilliant. Thank you to you all. I remember this story very well and the reaction from the public to the young girl. It was very difficult to understand her forgiveness to her captor, but the play dealt with her feelings and looked at her reasons clear and put over in an understanding way. I found the story very absorbing and I came away with a understanding of her personal view of her experience.Thanks again to all. P.S. The best play I have seen.

Riveting – superbly acted overall, fantastic theatre.

Great ! Really thought provoking and challenging. What good theatre is all about.

Very sensitively done, fine writing, well directed. A thought-provoking exploration of the subject. Congratulations.

I thought it was really excellent...very thought provoking....in fact we have had several long conversations about it since. I think it should be shown again SOON.

A piercing piece of theatre with sharp dialogue ... so sensitively and intelligently written, throwing up many more questions and answers, keeping the audience on the edge of their seats, and wanting more....The dance sequence was something else....So uninhibited, so sensual so credible...the highlight of this amazing drama....I want to see these two actors..again and again....They brought this play alive....As a member of the audience...I became sucked into their lives and their relationship ... Well directed, the story moved fluidly, and the chosen sound track was ace ... amazing team work.

Brilliant acting. Well staged. Thought provoking. Emotionally powerful without becoming tedious. A 1

Brilliant writing and directing. Great acting – especially at the end, that made my mascara run! I liked the comment about life not being black & white. Clever, thought-provoking, and humanistic. Well done!

Mascara was a thought-provoking play. The use of photos of the woman it centred around really set the scene. Really enjoyed it.

Very thought provoking, and I related to a lot of what was being said. Thought Oliver and Olivia worked very well together, and bounced off each other well. Seen Oliver in a few plays and he is consistently brilliant, and good at playing parts where he has to throw things around.

Very entertaining, reminded me a lot of a Theatre of the Oppressed production I saw at uni but with more comedic elements which made it even more enjoyable. ?

Powerful, real, intense, upsetting, brilliantly acted, relevant. I couldn't fault it.

A very powerful piece that was well-crafted, requiring maximum concentration to realise the benefit of such good writing and acting.

Good underlying tension. A sad and moving story about Natascha Kampusch treated well by the writer. Brilliant explosive and chilling ending. Great performances. The design was mesmerising in a literal way via a constant setting of being drawn into these amazing pictures as the play played out. Well done Crysse, Livvi, Ollie, Steve and Ann.

Very good story ? good acting, script, lighting and so forth. You should do spooky winter piece!

Interesting perspective, powerfully presented ?

It was a very powerful performance, filled with emotion, that connected essentially as a parallel narrative of two stories of abuse. I don't think much could be improved – the actors, set, and direction was very effective.

Gripping from the first moment. Enjoyed the lighter disco moments. Loved the set up (props)

Very powerful, very odd seeing my sister like that! The ending was extraordinary.

Thoughtful and insightful, with committed performances (and a good set design). But the two main characters were mouthpieces for opposing sides of an argument rather than flesh-and-blood people. I yearned to see the debate dramatised and not be told things that should be shown. Interesting and provocative but frustratingly static.

I loved this production. We were taken by friends so had no idea what we were about to see or the level of production, so it was a delight that the substance of the play was so thought provoking. The author did a wonderful job on threading opposing views so cleverly and made it impossible to ignore either. I was riveted throughout and could not help but feel sympathy for all the characters that were revealed in the play, so for me the play was wonderfully challenging in not allowing me to take a one sided view. The two actors were so talented and so convincing in parts that I would consider demanding. I found myself experiencing a series of emotions, so skillful were their performances. I wish all concerned much success with the play and look forward to seeing another production by your theatre company when next we visit Frome.

We saw Mascara on Friday 25/5/12. We thought it was a riveting performance by two talented actors - especially in the stifling heat! We regularly go to the theatre all over , including London and thought this performance was equal to any - and such value! They both deserve to go far!

Excellent drama. Well acted and emotionally absorbing.

Very well conceived. Impressive dealing of a very sensitive subject. Thank you.

Gripping, mesmerising, shocking, brilliantly acted.

Absolutely superb acting – very absorbing and believable. Well done Liv! I was very, very impressed. Congratulations to everyone involved in the play.

The play was completely absorbing. The characters changed so convincingly throughout the play. I felt fear, joy, pity, and huge sadness. A very explosive ending. Worth

seeing more than once.

Fascinating – really got you thinking. Superb actors who made each part they played believable. Excellent play, well researched and an interesting angle, and cleverly brought humour into a dark subject.

Fantastic. I was gripped throughout. Great performance by Olivia Dennis. Both actors did a brilliant job.

I thought the way the performance managed to mix humour and intensity was wonderful. It raised a lot of profound questions in a very interesting way.

Amazing!

Really fucked-up story, very thought-provoking – different ways of perceiving, who is really crazy?

The hour passed very quickly, and I was constantly engaged with the characters and the twists of plot and allusion. The relationship between Ralph and Leonie was developed so subtly that the extreme violence at the end was shocking.

And the title. Mascara as a form of mask/make-up to present a particular chosen image to the world. And being applied to the eyes, affecting one's own vision of oneself in the process?

Amazingly powerful performance in sweltering conditions - actors showed such dedication and energy!

What a performance. The two actors were absolutely superb, so natural, we were totally absorbed. Do congratulate them.

It was interesting to see how many conversations the play was generating outside the pub on Friday night. What I found was that it continued to build long after it was over. The immediate thoughts were of Leonie's identification with Natascha and of the childhoods and subsequent relationships of both girls; next day, I found myself thinking more about Ralph's need to distance himself and his own behaviour from Wolfgang (the 'pervert' and child abuser). No easy answers, only questions...

This is a very well acted and written two hander exploring the Natascha Kampusch story, with wider references to the nature of abuse within relationships, the meaning of love, and the role of 'victims' within society. We were gripped from start to finish - the climax has a visceral intensity which works brilliantly in this intimate space. Bloody Marvellous.



Mascara



Wonderful. Kept me totally enthralled throughout. Thank you once again for bringing this to Frome.

Wow !! A very sharp and potent media and society critique.

Went to the show at the Corner House, Frome, last night. Excellent play – moving, clever and poignant, extremely well acted and very disturbing.

I thought it was tremendous – varied, thought-provoking, amusing and shocking. Even though I remembered the story I became unsure I was correct in my memory. A play that leaves you with lots of interesting questions.

This was an immensely subtle and powerful play, passionately performed, about a very complex subject. Much food for thought. Will keep me reflecting, and talking, for a long time.

I saw this production in a stiflingly hot room upper room in the Pub with traffic noise outside and on hard unyielding chairs – but I was totally riveted throughout from the opening line to the ending. It was not an easy play to watch, but a terrific experience nonetheless, very convincing and mature acting. I particularly liked the music + set/ photographs. Now I have to read the book. Congratulations to all involved.

Brilliant. I was not distracted once – which is a real achievement for me! I was in 'the story' the whole time.

Thought-provoking – really great stuff.

Thankyou – I will be reading the book!

Liked the production. Very powerful, funny (moments) very thought-provoking. Both actors were v. good, especially young lady playing Leonie Where did you find her !?!

Wow! Extremely powerful play! And such a talented writer. I really need to read the book as well. Intimate venue great but some form of ventilation/air conditioning really needed. Engaging, challenging, thought-provoking – great night out. Thank you.

V GOOD PERFORMANCE – ENJOYED IT!

The actors switched characters quickly and convincingly. Quite worrying how assumptions are so easily made. Very well portrayed and sympathetically explored. Great evening.

V. powerful and thought-proving. Claustrophobia of intense heat was v. apt. V. glad we came.

Very good, emotionally hard-hitting. Minimal props/sound/ lighting effects meant the quality of acting/writing really showed through. Skilful look at what hasn't been said as well as what has. Enjoyed the intimate preview, but air-conditioning would be a great idea!

Beyond amazing. The actor Olivia was totally believable.

FIVE KINDS OF SILENCE

Absolutely brilliant! Wonderful acting – well done to all the cast. Very, very impressive. I found the whole play very powerful and very moving. Congratulations to all involved.

Excoriating and horribly truthful. The banality of domestic hysteria and despair. Thanks to S.O.T. for another brilliant show.

Amazing performances by all actors, albeit a disturbing and dark tale and full of resonance. Sadness, grief and humour pervaded a very intense evening. Should be on a bigger stage, such is the quality of this production.

Very real and lifelike. Deeply disturbing, but helpful to me as an incest survivor.

A very good, hard hitting performance raising an important topic. We need more like this to ensure that frontline funding is not cut and to ensure that domestic abuse stops!!

Amazing, well done! I am a child of abuse myself ... so realistic. Zach, you were so convincing, I am in awe of your talent. Great casting!

A very powerful performance which conveyed the fear of the women and the pathological personality of the father. We think he would score high on the PCL – R! Great acting – all of them. Close to the bone. It has made me reflect on the questions I will ask to my group members (sex offenders) in relation to victim empathy.

Moving, powerful, intense, surprising, especially considering the minimal space, lack of props etc – testament to the excellent acting. Gives pause for thought.

Wow, this went right under my skin. The mother, the daughters, the policeman/psychiatrist/lawyer... impossible to say who was the best actor of the four. Zach Lee, who played the father, was certainly one of a kind. His acting skills were unbelievable, swiftly moving from brutal to creepy to victim to mere abusing nightmare. Although dead he was constantly present lurking in the background, not letting his family go, reaching them even from his grave. Powerful stuff, highly recommended. (Rated : ***** 5 stars)

Proper eye contact theatre this with the ability to make you feel genuinely uncomfortable. The size of venue was perfect to make this work so well and the performances of the father and daughters totally convincing within an excellent script. Chilling. This was my first visit to the White Bear - what a friendly venue and how well they make use of their limited resources - the lighting was a very significant factor in creating the tension of this powerful play. (Rated : ***** 5 stars)



'I really enjoyed it. This play covered the important issues of domestic violence, suffering within the family and abuse. It opens eyes to problems that are not normally discussed. It was a rather heavy and deep experience but also very enriching and enjoyable. Acting was brilliant as well. Will definitely recommend this play!'

Wow! Blown away by this play. First theatre production I've been to in about 6 months and won't wait so long to book my next. Such talented actors and director. Well done to everyone involved, you have a lot to be proud of.

'Thoroughly enjoyed this. Very deep issues, explored sensitively. Enjoyed the bond between the women. Their terrifying life was portrayed well by the fact it was compared to prison (I work in a prison). Good work by all.'

The play was really deeply shocking and beautiful in language and intent. Damage can be very poetic. And we can laugh at the madness of obsession but living alongside/in it is no joke, is it?

The performances were great ... The abusive father, played by Zach Lee, was intimidating and always carried a quiet menace bubbling underneath, aided by his constant presence on stage to haunt the family even after his death. Tessa Wood as the mother and Olivia Dennis and Violet Ryder as the daughters all managed superbly the balance of the helpless victim haunted by the spectre of abuse whilst never quite giving up the hope of escape. (**** 4 stars)

There was nowhere to hide. Raw emotion flowed from each member of the family. The policeman/lawyer/psychiatrist posed short basic questions which drew angry responses. I too felt threatened at times by the intensity of the moment. A perfect example of the strength of performing in a small space. I stumbled out through a packed pub watching football and took welcome deep breaths from the chilly night. Go if you can. (Rated : ***** 5 stars)



It's a rare occurrence in the theatre that you forget that actors are delivering a script. This is just such a production. It's as if you are listening to real people relating real events. Harrowing, riveting and superb. I hope that it transfers to another venue as it certainly deserves to do so. Thanks very much Audience Club - without you I would have passed on this one due to the subject matter and thanks to all the Company for giving us top notch fringe theatre. (Rated : ***** 5 stars)

Brilliant! Very intense and a tough subject matter but handles magnificently. A must see. (Rated : ***** 5 stars)

Very interesting play indeed, consummately handled by the actors. Not for the emotionally fragile, as the subject matter is pretty harrowing - but brilliantly done, and highly recommended! (Rated : ***** 5 stars)

Amazing! A heavy topic but well written and wonderfully performed. (Rated : ***** 5 stars)

Tonight I felt I was in the presence of greatness as far as the acting went and the play was beautifully written. It was very harrowing and the people on either side of me were concerned about my state of alrightness! It was a full house and I would urge anyone to go and see it - just be prepared to be disturbed. (Rated : ***** 5 stars)

I don't want to rain on the parade of glowing 5 star reviews and the vitally important work of the Stepping Out Theatre; but this was relentlessly uncomfortable to sit through at times(you might say, that is the whole point). There were glimpses of a different journey and recovery I wanted to see explored, e.g. Susan and Janet's joy finding respite at the remand centre. Is abuse always cyclical ? The writing is potent and lyrical, the acting is extremely good, the drama is hard hitting but curiously I felt desensitised by the end (but again, was that the point ?) (Rated : *** 3 stars)

Five Kinds of Silence was absolutely excellent. When it had ended, it took me about five minutes to stop sobbing uncontrollably in the theatre. I'm still a bit shaky, so please forgive my handwriting.

I was stunned by the quality of the writing, production and acting of the play. I do not think you can say I enjoyed it because of the subject, but it has made me examine my own views on this subject and helped me explore them in ways never thought of before. Everyone should see this play, especially all people involved with the Police and in youth and domestic violence protection programs.

Absolutely riveting. 5 stars

Excellent play and great performances. Relentlessly harrowing but held the attention throughout. Deserves a bigger audience – would do well at the Cottesloe.

I really enjoyed the show. Very intense and superbly acted by the whole cast.

Excellent performances from all. Gripping and pacy. It chillingly portrays the cycles of damage, abuse and fear that exist and are very hard to break. The final line about the shelving made my heart sink.

Pleased I came to South London on a rainy winter evening, even tho' Billy was very hard to watch at times. Thank you!

I thoroughly enjoyed the production and the performance. It was well written and touched on a wide range of mental health issues, cultural norms and values, treatment modalities and expectations. I must say that the content of the program did raise a lot of questions within me and within my clinical discipline. I felt a sense of transference of powerlessness as portrayed by the family and the impotency of Psychiatry as it reaches out to people in their crisis to help but not really having the answers to alleviate their pain and suffering. I am thankful though as the production did help me to come even closer to looking into the windows and corridors of the minds of tormented and disturbed souls. Please give my regards and congratulations to the writer as her work was truly excellent.

Do yourself a favour and if you have a spare couple of hours go and see this incredibly absorbing play .. An absolute must see and well supported by a strong cast and an outstanding performance from Zach Lee as Billy. The White Bear is a fantastic, intimate venue ideal in hosting such play with the audience within touching distance of the thespians. This play could easily hold it's own in a larger venue if called upon. Top night out and well worth checking out.

This was a very good, although disturbing, play. Had I been fully aware of the content, I would probably not have gone to see it as it makes uncomfortable listening. However, I am glad that I did go as the acting was outstanding by all four members of the 'family' who were all frighteningly convincing in their very different ways!"

I was originally concerned with the idea of watching 90mins straight through in the very intimate space of the White Bear for 'A Kind of Silence', however due to the captivating performances by the very strong and able cast, this as well as the sensitive, but yet sometimes graphic direction, kept both my attention as much as my intrigue into the story. The issues of mental health were handled tastefully and having never been to the venue, nor seen a production by the company before, it has certainly been opened in my eyes to both.

90 minutes of breath taking tension. A dark story which needs to be told, with the most amazing cast (not a weak link) and full of insightful and frank monologues that dance you through this dark tale from every character. I was blown away with the acting and the script. The tension was perfect and kept me glued to my seat and I have not stopped talking about the quality of the production since I saw it. Better than most things I have seen in the west end in the past 10 years. Fester, but more intimate. The set was perfectly simple and fitted the production perfectly. Would and have recommended it to everyone I know.

I saw the show on friday night, and wow, what a performance. With such substantial material at the core, it was everything you want in a performance – engrossing, believable, thought provoking yet still enjoyable.

I found that I really enjoyed not only the "message" and content, but the individual characters are developed in such a way and with such care and emotion that you really felt pulled into the story and the emotion of it all...and yes, it is incredible to think that I both laughed and cried, probably in equal measure.



Madhampton.co.uk!



Feedback from Performers

*** A selection from some of the comments by service users who took part in our productions in 2012 – 13 about what they got from their involvement with Stepping Out Theatre**

I feel that it was one of the best things I have ever done. It did wonders for my confidence! Everyone in Stepping Out is so genuine and friendly – I've made so many new friends and being part of the group has filled my life with a new sense of purpose. Being in the play was a wonderful experience and has changed my life for the better. It was very emotional on the last night when we were all saying goodbye because I didn't want it to end. A big thank you Stepping Out.

I got a feeling of friendship and belonging out of being in the production. I felt an increase in mental well being and an escape from pressures in my life. I felt more confidence in myself and more of a belief in myself. I enjoyed it all so much. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to have a go.

I loved being back with 'the old gang', but also meeting and acting with lovely new people. I felt properly part of it this year.

Being in the play this year has helped me during a difficult time. My dad got ill with terminal cancer. During rehearsals,

I was able to focus on lines etc and not my sadness. Without having the show to focus on, I don't think I could have coped so well with things. When dad succumbed to his condition I was able to keep pretty level because I had the show and the support of people in the group. What I got out of the production was the strength and fortitude to deal with my grief.

I was very happy with the experience of being in the show and the new friendships I made and all the positive feedback from everyone. I have made a number of new friends and the involvement in Stepping Out encouraged me to do a drama course. I have improved my acting skills and learnt to approach mental health in a completely new way. The experience has provided me with invaluable knowledge and profound happy times.

I made lots of new friends and have gained valuable experience in theatre performance. The project has great educational value.

I got a huge boost in personal confidence out of being in the play, not just as an 'actress', but because I did something totally new for me and with a whole load of new people which I would have been unable to face usually – but having a focus, rehearsing, made it easy and enjoyable being with new people.

I got a warm feeling of being in a real community working together and being part of a team. I got the joy and satisfaction of working together with a great group of people to create something really special. A sense of real achievement. It was one of the happiest productions every and I really can't think how it could have gone better.

This year doing the show was basically my life. I have made new friendships thanks to facing my demons during the production and now, to quote my character in the play, I want to be part of the world.

It's really moving when the whole play comes together at the end against all the odds, and it's brilliant. I feel Stepping Out is a breath of fresh air. The togetherness and warmth of the group is always something I love. I feel I can be myself around everyone. I believe the group have welcomed me back with open arms. The company is so inspiring and I feel I have found the actor in me once again and my love for the stage! I also feel my facilitating skills have grown and my confidence in being in a team.

What I got out of the play was a chance for me to demonstrate my magic and a chance for my family to see me doing something constructive, not having done my magic for a while.

I got stage fright!! I also became very high after suffering sleepless nights, but it was all right on the night, so a great achievement. Glad I stuck with it.

Being in Stepping Out is the only time, other than when I'm at home, that I feel comfortable without makeup, and can wear jogging bottoms because I feel I can be myself and not be judged. It's fun and nice to be able to meet up with honest, real people who talk openly about life rather than meaningless small talk. It's great to be able to see friendships grow.

This year's show had a great feeling of ... unity. It seemed to be growing in strength and ability weekly. New friendships were forged and a heartwarming company feeling abounded.

Being in the play I got to ham it up, my nearest chance at pantomime. I met up with some old friends and made new ones. It let me escape my very unsettled life for a wee while and helped me to laugh.

I loved the lightness and laughter and sense of belonging to a community. It's a meaningful activity with new friends, a chance to play act creatively. I love the applause and laughter every night from really good audiences who evidently appreciated our efforts and laughed and laughed some more. It's good to feel part of something so important to well being.



Reviews

* A selection from some of this year's reviews

Stephen Bates in The Public Reviews

This a study of violence inside a family which never resorts to simplistic explanations nor points the finger of blame in a single direction. Yes, the father is guilty of appalling physical, psychological and sexual abuse but the play, whilst never excusing him, is able to show how he was himself a victim of childhood traumas. It also questions the extent to which the three women were complicit in their own and each other's torment. Set on a near empty stage in a small studio space, the fluid direction ensures that every member of the audience is drawn into the intense drama, as the women gradually reveal their secrets and attempt to understand what has happened so as to rid their minds of the horrors.

As Billy, the father, Zach Lee is stunning, making it perfectly credible that the three women could loathe and love him at the same time; his character is both a perpetrator and a victim of violence, suffering from alcoholism and epilepsy, yet, however monstrously he behaves, the actor is still able to eke out a degree of sympathy for him. As Mary, the mother, Tessa Wood gives a moving performance, her character was a neglected child who seemed cast by nature into the role of victim; yet she is aware of her own inability to stop the abuse and, understanding that it crosses generations, she is determined that she does not want grandchildren. Violet Ryder plays Janet, the older daughter as clear-thinking and resolute in determining the only way to end the horror, but equally vulnerable and prone to emotional outbursts. Olivia Dennis plays her younger sister Susan as more confused by her own emotions and racked by personal guilt. Anthony Hoskyns as the women's interrogator completes the quintet of fine actors.

This play is produced by Stepping Out Theatre, the leading mental health theatre group. The writing is stark and unflinching, but still able to allow for occasional dashes of humour. The characters in the play are people who live amongst us. Their plight was allowed to continue because all four remained silent. Yet the outside world saw signs too and also remained silent. Even in its title, this play asks questions of us all.

Laura Barnett in Time Out

Billy is dead. His daughters have shot him – once in the stomach, then once more, to make sure he's really gone. His wife Mary knows they'll have to call the police – but there's his bottle of whisky to get through first.

Such is the opening scene of Shelagh Stephenson's gut-wrenching examination of intra-family abuse, which

won several awards as a radio drama before first being adapted for the stage in 2000. Harrowing doesn't come close: as Billy's terrorised daughters gradually lift the lid on what drove them to kill him, we hear horrific accounts of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. In between come monologues from Billy and Mary, describing the pain and violence of their own childhoods.

It requires particular courage of an actor to play the kind of unreconstructed psychopath we meet in Billy – Zach Lee more than rises to the challenge. His performance is pure lean, musclebound menace, shot through with an equally disturbing seam of vulnerability. There's some good work from the rest of the cast, too – particularly Violet Ryder as the elder daughter, Janet – and the writing contains some beautiful lyrical passages. Stephenson's play is a brave exposé of abuse which, as its title implies, too often remains hidden behind veils of silence.

Crysse Morrison in Plays International

Bristol-based Stepping Out theatre company's current production opened in London at the White Bear Theatre Kennington. Five Kinds of Silence has won two awards for writer Shelagh Stephenson and it's easy to see why: the story is heinous but the script glitters, lyrical and laconic by turn, and with startling dark humour from the opening moment when Susan and Janet shoot their father while their mother whimpers 'I should have done that.' From this point we follow the fall-out as years of normalised abuse are peeled back to show what happens when two traumatised children grow up and meet and marry, and then there are two more children...'We're just a case history' says Janet, learning the vocabulary of 'feeling' that will pacify baffled professionals, but to both girls words like vulnerable are useless. 'You just survive,' says Susan, 'You don't tell anyone. Because it's private.' These curt interviews are interspersed with richer imagery in their personal monologues, especially Billy, who recalls the night he met Mary: 'The world is black and cold but I'm taking her with me. She smiles. It's better than killing the cat. Though somehow that's muddled in too.' Billy is an immensely complex man as well as the savage dog of his dreams, and his daughters loved him, though as Janet says, it's sad he wasn't nicer so they wouldn't have had to kill him.

This is a play that could be too harrowing to watch easily, but director Chris Loveless and a stunning cast have created a totally gripping piece of theatre which, while deeply moving, allows us to engage with compassion and even with hope. The relationship between the two daughters, superbly played with sensitive restraint by Violet Ryder and Olivia Dennis, is tender and truthful, and Zach Lee as Billy can change from beautiful to monstrous in a moment and is always charismatic. This



extraordinary production runs to February 17th. It has pin-drop attention and passionate applause from the full-house first-night audience so if you're anywhere near London, book while you can.

Giles Cole in whatsonstage

How do you explain persistent sexual abuse and physical violence? How do you explain your own conspiracy of silence over many years? How do you live with the continuing presence of the perpetrator, now dead, and whom you have shot, twice, to make sure he doesn't get up again? And how do you begin to recover from such experiences? These are the questions posed in Shelagh Stephenson's harrowing psycho-drama.

... Five Kinds of Silence is still a very potent analysis of a family driven to murder by years of abuse at the hands of a sadistic bully of a husband and father, Billy, played with terrifying ferocity by Zach Lee ... it's an unrelentingly grim experience, but one which retains a sense of hope in the human spirit. Director Chris Loveless gets the balance just right. (**** 4 out of 5 stars)

Mampam Theatre Blog

The White Bear Theatre in Kennington has is staging a production of Five Kinds Of Silence from January 29 to February 17, and its sparsely-furnished theatre seems perfectly suited to the bleak outlook of the subject matter. The staging area is tiny, and forty or seats are squeezed in at the edge of the playing area, meaning that a full house (and last night's production was full) invites a creepy intimacy to proceedings. The play opens with Billy, the brutal patriarch, relating a dream in which he is a dog with glorious hypotyposis: he talks of "jewels and metal and wood and meat" and seems particularly obsessed with the smell of things: blood, metal, fear, armpits. The dream, of which the cause is later revealed, is interrupted by his being shot dead by his daughters. When later questioned by police, lawyers and psychiatrists, the family, at first collectively and subsequently individually, projects its worldview by means of a shattered chronology; fragments of the past and present intermingle with flashbacks of varying degrees of reliability, which lends a Rashomon-style sensibility to the drama, where we cannot be entirely sure of the truths being emitted. Billy himself appears frequently,

punctuating proceedings with his own recollections of his own broken childhood.

Familial abuse is cyclical, perpetuating and self-destructive, and essentially is focused around the key theme of the play, control. The play not only oddly suspends judgment of Billy, a tattoo-covered, bovver-booted obsessive-compulsive (the order in which he likes the groceries to be stored in the kitchen is humorously related by Mary) skinhead, but invites sympathy for him; he has suffered abuse at the hands of his own mother, an experience which shapes describes his own motivations and desires for control.

The performances throughout are outstanding. Anthony Hoskins provides solid support as the straight-man ensemble (Policeman / Lawyer / Psychiatrist), and provides the leading players enough room to shine. Violet Ryder plays Janet with schizophrenic energy, in turns hysterical and uncertain, beautiful and broken, unsure of herself and her place in this strange world she finds herself. Tessa Wood alone as Mary injects some lightness of touch into proceedings; the scenes where her timorous wife happily tells us that Billy would have been pleased that his shirt looks so neat as he lies on the ground filled with bullets, and proudly lists the groceries in the kitchen, are greatly needed to lift the air of unending doom. She movingly hints at a happier past, filled with innocence, dancing, and glasses of port & lemon, yet now is a mere husk of a woman, bereft of her dreams and unable to recognise the destructive power of her love for Billy.

Olivia Dennis is outstanding as Susan; bolshy, ashamed and gloriously twitchy, constantly gathering her cardigan around her like an aegis and stubbornly batting away any attempts at emotional extraction attempted by her inquisitors, including herself.

Also outstanding is Zach Lee as Billy; his is a dervish of a performance. At points he is squirming and crawling around the floor like Gollum, literally spitting out his recollections and daydreams with visceral intensity, and at others he lurks in the shadows of the stage, steering the thoughts and deeds of the women during their inquisition even after death like an aphotic, undead sentinel, making what use he can from the scant staging. The White Bear has a little gem on its hands here, and deserves to see many more full houses on its way through February. (**** 4.5 out of 5 stars)

The Bristol Evening Post

Since they formed in 1997, Bristol's Stepping Out have built an impressive body of work exploring themes around mental health, ranging from big cast shows such as 'Bedlam – the Movie!' to the more intimate and atmospheric Lullabies of Broadmoor quartet. In their 37th show, a co-production with Chrysalis Theatre and

Dreamweavers, they again deploy maximum bodies onstage to deliver a rumbustious blend of pantomime, dance and anarchy.

A group of online friends meet through Madhampton.co.uk, a therapeutic community where troubled souls can live and meet via their online personas. A virtual English village with larger-than-life characters, Madhampton appears to offer sanctuary for troubled minds. When the group decide to meet in real-time, though, they discover matters are taking a sinister turn - and that someone else is controlling things.

Our damaged protagonists include a soldier with post-traumatic stress, a young woman abused by her stepfather and a psychiatrist bullied and exploited by her father. With each character battling their own demons, the discovery that they are pawns in someone else's game leads to rebellion and ultimately, empowerment.

The play, written by Stepping Out stalwart Mark Breckon, explodes into action with a dazzling disco scene, thumped out to 'Just an Illusion' - the first of many thoughtfully referenced numbers that offer a satisfying dollop of 70s cheese to the proceedings. The action soon moves to Savernake Forest where we meet the Square Wheelers, an atavistic band of Luddites bent on reversing technology and restoring the natural order of things.

Cue a medley of characters - evil scientist, power hungry business baron, deranged medical officer - to tighten their pernicious grip on their victims and control their destinies. There are many twists and turns to confound the characters, but they discover untapped resources along the way to find courage and help them discover their sense of self.

For every mental health theme in this play there are counterpoints of scripted or visual daftness that offset the darker stuff without diminishing its importance.

Stepping Out are brilliant at engendering a sense of warmth and community to their work that

neutralises notions of victimhood, and they certainly have a great talent for timing and slapstick. The piece felt a little too long and dragged in places, but the final number - 'Age of Aquarius' - ensured a rock-opera climax to a fearless and energetic show.



GP-W in thisisdorset.co.uk

Journalist Leonie wants to find a new angle on the story of the Austrian girl who was kidnapped at the age of ten and spent the next eight years a prisoner in the home of Wolfgang Priklopil ... she fills their flat with cuttings and books about Kampusch at the same time as finding things about her own life that mirror that of the abducted celebrity ... Morrison's intense and powerful play follows Leonie's own mental progress through the bizarre story, and Ralph's attempts to assist, follow and support her endeavours, while becoming increasingly frustrated and angry at a mounting obsession which he believes to be potentially damaging to his lover and their relationship ... Mascara is essentially an exploration of the darkest canyons of the human mind, as well as a celebration of determination in the face of great odds.

The play's name comes from the "treat" that Natascha asked her captor to buy her, and its application punctuates the action ... Playing Leonie and Ralph, with momentary cameos as Wolfgang and Natascha, therapists, journalist and photographers, Oliver Millingham and Olivia Denis explore the twists and turns of a relationship with scarifying power and compelling reasoning.

Perhaps a few scenes need a little tightening up, but the opening night, in the torrid heat of the intimate Corner House, was an unforgettable experience.

Diana Cambridge (Writing Magazine)

Powerful, formidable, compelling. Original research into a true story both chilling and touching...every moment of the play was gripping. Some strange truths evolve, especially about the mother-daughter relationship and the collusion of all relationships. Really memorable and exciting....a play that will keep you thinking about it for days. I did. A real triumph for Crysse Morrison and everyone involved in the production.

** 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 does limit what we are able to do, we are still able to do important work at the Unit. The last large scale performance inside the Unit was in 2010. We offered Fromeside some more performances in 2011 / 12, but unfortunately we were not able to offer anything that the staff felt was suitable for service users there.

Late in 2010 we produced a poetry anthology by a Fromeside service user, 'Selected Poems' by L. S. Kimberley (pen name). 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. We published a second anthology by L.S. Kimberley in 2012. This anthology was launched at the Bristol Old Vic, supported again by local writers, along with another anthology by Kehinde Obileye, a group member whose first anthology we also helped to publish in 2011.

Copies of all of these anthologies are available from the Stepping Out office.



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. 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.

The highlight of this year's social calendar was a special trip to the West End in London to see our patron Mark Rylance perform in 'Twelfth Night'. This trip was attended by 30 group members.



Our Annual Xmas get together was entertained by our first ever Xmas production. 'Flaming Crackers' received two performances in Bristol and one in Frome and proved to be a great success again with group members and requests for it to be made a regular event.

We ran our usual series of trips to all the productions in the 2012 Theatre West season at the Alma Tavern Theatre, as well as other productions such as The Bristol Old Vic's wonderful 'Peter Pan' in January 2013.

Playback Theatre Group

Playback Theatre has formed a regular part of Stepping Out and Chrysalis Theatre's work for many years. It was first used in the creation of 'Waiting for Wilmot' in 2010 and it was used in other work, including at Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital. These Playback Theatre workshops were run by Amanda Brown, Alison Fairlove and their colleagues from Playback Theatre South West, one of the leading Playback Theatre groups in the country.

This year, in collaboration with Chrysalis Theatre, Stepping Out has set up its own Playback Theatre group, headed by Cheryl Douglas. This group is meeting regularly, accessing Playback training for its members, and working towards developing a Playback Theatre strand in the work of the group. This new initiative received a boost recently when Chrysalis Theatre successfully applied for an Awards for All grant specifically to fund Playback activities. These activities will be open to all Stepping Out and Chrysalis Theatre members.

The Stepping Out Dramatherapy Group

Beth Jones, who formerly ran the 'Playing Up' drama group with Lee Brodie is now a fully qualified dramatherapist. For the last three years, Beth has run dramatherapy groups for Stepping Out Theatre.

Dramatherapy groups offer members the opportunity for a more structured and formal therapeutic engagement with drama. We invited Beth back to run two twelve week groups for us in 2012 - 13 and these were a great success.

Feedback from service users attending the two groups this year included the following;

"I thought it was a good group and I really enjoyed every moment."

"Dramatherapy 2012 has been amazing! I've made some really good friends and have been challenged to understand my mental health issues - even to overcome them. I feel much happier and healthier for it!"

"Found it very tough at times but very worthwhile and learned a lot. Thanks Beth, you were great!"

"A creative and useful use of time that has taught me a lot about myself and how I react to mine and others emotions."

"Good space to meet in. Supportive group and challenging at the same time (in a good way). Beth held the space well and helped us open up through the activities. Good length for an introduction to dramatherapy. Makes me want to do more dramatherapy."

"It has been good being part of this dramatherapy group. I feel it has been of some help to me and I'm pleased to have continued to the end."

"Challenging. Insightful. Fun. Thanks for your efforts. Greatly appreciated."

"Thank you Beth. I definitely feel more calm and more confident in a group. I also feel a great sense of achievement that I actually stayed in the group for the whole 10 weeks."



Ernie Bell – Stepping Out – the Songs from the Shows 2002 – 2011

After a lengthy process of recording with singer songwriter Ernie Bell and many group members, 2011 saw the release of a special CD of all the songs that Ernie had written for Stepping Out theatre over the previous 12 years. The earliest of these were for Bard of Bedlam in 2001, and the most recent for Bedlam – The Movie! in 2011. The project was a co – production between Stepping Out and local mental health music group Mind Your Music. It has given us a permanent record of the many Ernie Bell songs – comic, beautiful and haunting – that have been such an important feature of so many of our large scale productions over the last decade.

The CD was launched at a special gig on the Grain Barge in May 2011 in the Bristol Docks area where Ernie, supported by Elliot Hall sang and played many of the tracks from the CD.

Copies of the CD are available from the Stepping Out office, or from Mind Your Music.

Fundraising Activities - Stepping Out Sponsored Walk / The Big Give

Stepping Out Theatre first took part in the Big Give Xmas Fundraising Challenge in 2011, and one of the activities we organised that year was the first ever Stepping Out Sponsored Walk.

Members walked from Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital to the Alma Tavern Theatre in Clifton to symbolise the journey from mental ill health to healing through the creative power of theatre.

The event was a great success and helped raise a considerable sum towards our Big Give Fundraising Target. We therefore decided to repeat the activity in November 2012 where once again, it was well attended and raised a considerable sum for the group. The sponsored walk was one of the last group activities that Gill Amphlett took part in.

The Big Give Xmas Challenge 2012 raised even more for the group than in 2011, and has now become a vital part of the group's finances, and a regular part of the group's calendar.



Gill Amphlett and friends at the end of the Sponsored Walk 2012

Our Website

Throughout 2007 – 13 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 Trustee 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 jointly runs a programme of workshops and productions involving service users from its target groups. To date, we have mounted fourteen 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 and other activities, including a new Playback Theatre group, up to the end of 2013.

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. In 2011 they came to the end of a three year programme of work funded by the Big Lottery Fund, but they have just received news of the successful outcome of a second application to the Big Lottery Fund which will create the first ever permanent paid worker for the group. This worker will be in post by Summer 2013 and the post will be funded up to 2016.

Mind Your Music were our main partners in producing a CD of music by Fromeside singer songwriter Jonathan Little, and in 2011, they co – produced a new CD of all the music written by Ernie Bell and used in Stepping Out's stage productions over the previous ten years. Copies of this CD 'Ernie Bell – Songs from the Stepping Out shows 2002 - 2011' are available from the Stepping Out office, or from Mind Your Music.

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 many stage shows with Stepping Out. After successfully obtaining an Awards For All grant recently, they will co – produce a major new production with Stepping Out Theatre in Autumn 2013.

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 went on to direct 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 three London productions with us. There are plans to revive the Fallen Angel co – production of 'Ray Collins Dies On Stage' in London in late 2013 or 2014. We will also be co – producing a new musical with Chris directing, based on Thomas Hardy's classic novel 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' in 2013 / 2014.

FINANCIAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS
2012/13

In the financial year 2012 / 13, the group received a total of £ 119,127.79 in income, and spent a total of £120,640.80. As expected, these figures were significantly down on last year where income and expenditure were both inflated by the massive ‘Lullabies of Broadmoor’ national tour.

The last instalments of our current grants from the Lankelly Chase Foundation and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation continued to fund the Project Co – ordinator and Deputy Project Co – ordinator posts up until the end of the financial year. In the third year of this funding, we continued to show just what we can achieve with this enhanced funding for core hours. We were fortunate enough to replace both these grants with a new three year grant from the Big Lottery Fund which funds the two core workers’ salaries up until February 2016.

The Network for Social Change were an important new funder this year and their grant of £14.8k made a huge difference to the amount of work we could do with service users in individual productions.

Box office revenues were very much inflated in 2011 by Lullabies of Broadmoor, and so were very much lower this year as expected.

An important new stream of income last year was the Big Give Xmas Challenge. This continued to be important this year, raising a huge amount for the group from a series of fundraising activities and a very generous group of donors.

As usual, the largest items of expenditure were salaries and payments to the freelance artists and service users involved in an ambitious programme of productions.

At a Trustee meeting early in 2010, the Trustees set a goal of building up unrestricted reserves of 10% of our income during the year 2010 / 11 which was successfully achieved. In 2011 – 12, we ended the year with unrestricted reserves of £14,488.27 which is almost exactly 10.0% of our income. For the third year running in 2012 - 13, we ended the year with a surplus of £12,955 in unreserved income which again amounted to roughly 10% of our total income. This amount was raised principally through the Big Give Xmas Fundraising Challenge. 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.

Stepping Out Theatre aims to retain a minimum of 10% of income each year in the form of unrestricted reserves.

Stepping Out Theatre Company Accounts
1st March 2012 - 28th February 2013

Section A - Receipts

	Restricted	Unrestricted	2012/13	2011/12
Lankelly Chase Grant (1)	15,000.00		15,000.00	15,000.00
Big Lottery Fund Grant (2)	16,882.00		16,882.00	16,391.00
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (3)	22,334.00		22,334.00	21,859.00
Arts Council Grant for the Arts	0.00		0.00	1,000.00
Awards for All	0.00		0.00	10,000.00
For Social Change (4)	14,820.00		14,820.00	0.00
Comic Relief (5)	10,000.00		10,000.00	35,000.00
Big Give Xmas Challenge - Donations (6)		39,601.66	39,601.66	27,717.29
Contributions to Co-Production Costs - Dreamweavers		0.00	0.00	0.00
Contributions to Co-Production Costs - Fallen Angel		0.00	0.00	500.00
Contributions to Co-Production Costs - Chrysalis Theatre		0.00	0.00	5,164.00
Contributions to Co-Production Costs - Mind Your Music		0.00	0.00	500.00
Small Mental Health Grants		0.00	0.00	2,500.00
Box Office Receipts		414.00	414.00	9,307.71
Members’ Contributions		0.00	0.00	365.70
Interest and Refunds		76.13	76.13	24.88
Other		0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL RECEIPTS	79,036.00	40,091.79	119,127.79	145,329.58

(continued)

Section B - Payments

Payments	Restricted	Unrestricted	2012/13	2011/12
Payroll	35,334.00	401.45	35,735.45	36,501.14
Rent (incl. Theatre Hire)	4,502.00	772.05	5,274.05	29,835.05
General Running Expenses	0.00	7,427.44	7,427.44	3,459.70
Miscellaneous Production Costs	1,688.00	7,308.20	8,996.20	6,029.42
Training	2,251.00	73.84	2,324.84	3,149.00
Travel for Staff and Volunteers	2,252.00	3,018.94	5,270.94	4,986.03
Subsistence	0.00	4,346.73	4,346.73	4,733.03
Promotional Materials	1,125.00	856.30	1,981.30	4,546.00
Theatre Trips	0.00	3,172.00	3,172.00	1,427.74
Charitable Donations	0.00	2,020.00	2,020.00	1,550.00
Workshop Leader Fees	0.00	3,454.44	3,454.44	639.47
Freelance Workers and Artists	31,884.00	8,759.41	40,643.41	40,595.71
Net Fixed Assets	0.00	0.00	0.00	122.71
Total	79,036.00	41,610.80	120,646.80	137,575.00

Section C - Balance Sheet

	Restricted	Unrestricted	2012/13	2011/12
Bank Balance at Start of Year	0.00	14,488.27	14,488.27	
Bank Receipts	79,036.00	40,091.79	119,127.79	
Bank Payments	-79,036.00	-41,610.80	-120,646.80	
Bank Balance at End of Year	0.00	12,969.26	12,969.26	14,488.27
Cash Balance at Start of Year	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Cash Receipts	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Cash Payments	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Cash Balance at End of Year	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Fixed Assets at Start of Year	0.00	955.36	955.36	
Sales	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Purchases	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Depreciation @ 50% per year	0.00	-477.68	-477.68	
Fixed Assets at End of Year	0.00	477.68	477.68	955.36
Receivables at End of Year	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Payables at End of Year	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Net Assets at End of Year	0.00	13,446.94	13,446.94	15,443.63

Section D - 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 - Ordinator and associated costs of developing the work of the group.
- 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 Esmee 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 Network for SC were treated as a restricted fund used only for the purposes stated in the original grant application. I.e. Funding productions and core work.
- 5) Funds received from Comic Relief 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 2012-2013.
- 6) Funds raised in charitable donations through participation in The Big Give Xmas Challenge. Treated as unrestricted income but with a special remit to meet extra production costs during 2012-2013.

Section E - Approvals

- Mark Breckon (Treasurer)**
8th May 2013
- Beverley Jackson (Independent Examiner)**
8th May 2013

