

Stepping Out Theatre
**ANNUAL
REPORT
2013/14**
www.stepsoutingtheatre.co.uk





“

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

CONTENTS OF ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

- 3 Reference and Administrative Details**
- 4 Structure, Governance and Management**
- 5 Project Co-ordinator's Report**
- 6 Progress on the Aims and Objectives of the Group 2013/14**
- 8 Productions 2013/14**
- 14 Feedback from Audiences**
- 20 Feedback from Performers**
- 22 Reviews**
- 23 Poetry Work at Fromeside Clinic and elsewhere**
- 24 Gill Amphlett Social Fund**
- 24 The Playback Theatre Group**
- 24 Drama and Devising for Performance Group**
- 25 Ernie Bell – Stepping Out – the Songs from the Shows 2002 – 2011**
- 25 Fundraising Activities - Stepping Out Sponsored Walk / The Big Give**
- 25 Stepping Out Theatre Online**
- 26 Other Work – Associated Groups and Co-Producers**
- 27 Financial Report and Accounts for 2013/14**

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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South Gloucestershire, BS15 4RP

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 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 2013 – 14 was held at 7.00 p.m. on 30th July 2013 at the Gasworks Studio, 27 Narrowways Road, St. Werburgh’s, Bristol. The following eight trustees were elected to serve a period of twelve months or until the next AGM.

Trustees 2013 - 2014

Kirsty Cox - Co-Chair
Tom Collis - Co-Chair
Danann McAleer – Secretary
Mark Breckon – Treasurer
Alison Comley - Trustee
Jasmine Darke - Trustee
Tom Jones – Trustee
Emma Staddon – 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 theatre and the arts. Any group member can put themselves forward for, or be nominated to be a Trustee.

Project Co-ordinator's Report

2013 – 14 was the first year of a new three year programme of work funded mainly by the Big Lottery Fund and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the group continued to grow and thrive. 2013 – 14 was also our most successful year yet of fundraising with the help of the Big Give, ensuring that we ended the year once again in good shape financially. We continue to produce a large amount of high quality theatre and provide a wider range of theatre – related activities. In particular;

Right: Group member and Social Secretary Gillian Amphlett who died in 2012

Below: The group watching a production at The Minack Theatre in Cornwall



- The security of three years of funding enabled us to mount our largest number of productions ever in a single year – 8 productions and co - productions in 12 months. One of these productions toured to 7 cities, and another had a four week run in London.
- Alongside these productions we ran a completely new set of workshops – Drama and Devising for Performance with Marc Geoffrey and Kirsty Cox. This group devised and performed a new piece of drama for the rest of the Company.
- The new Gill Amphlett Social Fund laid on a busy series of theatre trips and a large four day summer outing to Cornwall taking in two shows at the Minack Theatre.
- The Stepping Out / Chrysalis Theatre Playback Theatre Group went from strength to strength recruiting new members and mounting its first public performances.



Hermione Steel and the Islands of Lost Minds

- 2013 was the year in which group members slowly came to terms with the loss of Stepping Out's much loved former Social Secretary and Trustee Gill Amphlett who died on November 22nd 2012. 'Hermione Steele and the Island of Lost Minds', this year's large scale production, was dedicated to Gill and offered group members the opportunity to remember her and take part in a project that was a tribute to her personally, and to all the work she did for the group. In November 2013, group members were involved in a week of events to mark the anniversary of Gill's death including the annual Sponsored Walk, and the interment of Gill's ashes on November 22nd 2013.
- The year started with our third commission for a full length play from Mark Breckon for 2013, 'Hermione Steele and the Island of Lost Minds'. The year finished with our fourth commission from him for a fourth full length play for 2014, 'Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness'.
- Three of our productions this year were undertaken as usual with our sister group Chrysalis Theatre,

who work with drug and alcohol service users, and who are the lead group in developing the new strand of Playback Theatre within the work of both groups. The two groups worked as closely together as ever in 2013 – 14.

- We also mounted two co productions with Partisan Theatre, three with Dreamweavers, and one each with Theatre West in Bristol, The Ashton Group in Barrow-in-Furness and London-based Cabinet of Cynics.
- We mounted 9 performances of our large scale production 'Hermione Steele and the Island of Lost Minds' at The Brewery Theatre.
- We published a new anthology of poetry by a local service user and held a highly successful launch event for this at the Bristol Old Vic. 'Love's Gutter' by Thomas Glover gained a large number of endorsements from celebrity poets.
- 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.

We performed at two conferences this year – the NHS Primary Care Leadership Development Programme, and a Mental Health Research Network event aimed at involving people with mental health problems.

- Group members were present at the launch of the Bristol Hate Crime Service which was attended by almost 200 people including the Lord Mayor, senior police, social service and service user and voluntary organisation reps. Group member Charlie Ekpalo was asked to perform a new poem written specially for this event and she continues to be involved as a service user rep on the development of this service.

2013 - 14 was our seventeenth year as a group and our seventh year of operation as a registered charity. Being a charity continues to open up important new funding possibilities for our work.

Work on 'Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness' was well advanced by the end of the year.

Progress on The Aims and Objectives of Stepping Out Theatre 2013/14

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.

Girl Talk



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.
- 2) We mounted a record – breaking eight 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 primarily in Bristol, Frome and London, but also in many places where we had not performed before such as Lancaster and Barrow in Furness.
- 3) As well as producing eight 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 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

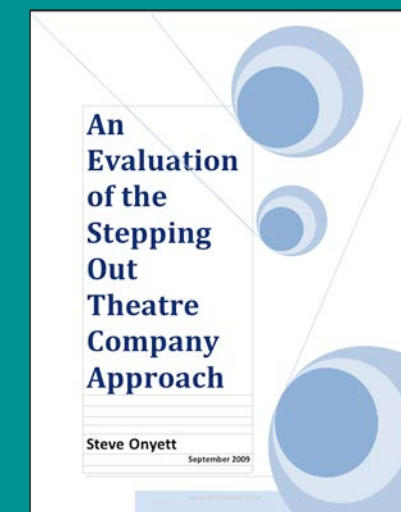
The 'Key Messages' of the Evaluation were as follows;

- 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 the Evaluation. Funders have been impressed with the conclusions that Steve Onyett's research has come to.



Productions 2013/14

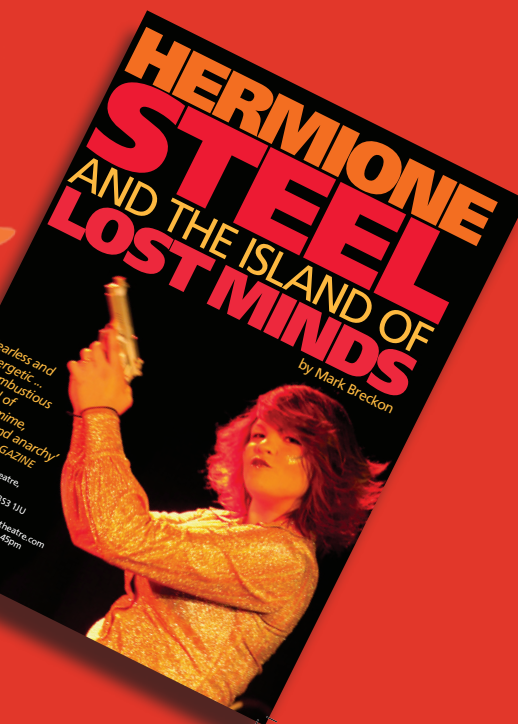
Hermione Steele and the Island of Lost Minds

With the help of a magical, giant lava lamp, Mental Health Detective Hermione Steele leads an expedition to the mysterious Island of Lost Minds where Mindsweepers roam searching for fresh brains to feed on. Yuk!

And a company of actors race against time to put on a play about her quest ...

The team she takes with her must draw more and more deeply on their own experiences. But there is no guarantee the expedition will be successful. An enjoyable and therapeutic experience where they find what they have lost? Or an ill-fated expedition where they risk and lose the little they have left?

This was the third and final play in Mark Breckon's 'Bedlam' trilogy following on from 'Bedlam – The Movie!' in 2011 and 'Madhampton.co.uk' in 2012. It was produced at the Brewery in April 2013, our fourth large scale production there, and was a great success with 31 people on stage and many others taking part in the process leading up to performances. This production set a new record for the longest run at a single venue for a large scale Stepping Out Theatre production, with 9 performances at the Brewery Theatre. It was the third full length play commissioned from Mark Breckon and it was the first full length play to be directed by Project Co - ordinator Steve Hennessy. It received excellent audience feedback. The production was dedicated to Gill Amphlett, group



member, cast member, trustee, Co – Chair and Social Secretary. Feedback from all those taking part showed that most members felt that rehearsing and performing this production was a powerful and effective way of processing painful feelings about the loss of a much loved and much missed group member.

Hermione Steel and the Islands of Lost Minds



Diary of a Madman

Poprishchin, a lowly civil servant in nineteenth century St. Petersburg, has fallen in love with his boss's daughter. Not all love stories have a happy ending ...

Surreal, hilarious and heartbreaking - Gogol's masterpiece remains one of the most compelling representations of madness ever conceived. Stepping Out's previous production of 'Diary of a Madman' in 2007 - 8 notched up 46 performances. As well as 6 weeks in theatre locations, it toured to secure psychiatric wards, day centres and drug and alcohol hostels in Bristol, where it received amazing responses from patients and staff alike.

This new production teamed Associate Director Chris Loveless up with actor Anthony Hoskyns. The new production also performed inside psychiatric facilities and drug and alcohol hostels as well as a special performance inside the gothic splendour of the Anglican Chapel at Arnos Vale Cemetery Bristol for World Mental Health Day. It toured to ten different locations in nine cities, setting a new record for the group with the ambition of its touring schedule. This included many places where the group had not performed before – The Duke's Theatre in Lancaster, the Oxford Playhouse Studio, Cooke's Studios in Barrow – in – Furness, the Bike Shed in Exeter and the New Wimbledon Studio in London. This small and highly portable production is still taking bookings for 2014 and 2015.



Dust to Dust

Liam's gone and died and Marie's not at all happy. After 30 years of marriage he goes and does a thing like that - drops dead on the golf course without so much as a by your leave. Now Marie wants some answers and when psychic and purveyor of all things paranormal Leyton von Geist hits town it seems her prayers may be answered ...

The partnership with our longstanding collaborators and local new writing specialists Theatre West started in 2001 with 'Wilderness' and is still going strong. Directed by Stepping Out Theatre Associate Director Chris Loveless, this new play by local writer Rachel O'Shea was the seventh co - production between the two groups and had a two week run at the Alma Tavern Theatre as part of Theatre West's second A-Z season of new writing.

Dust to Dust



Girl Talk



solo stage appearance in 'Girl Talk'. These two massive monologues would challenge any actor, let alone actors untrained and with no previous professional experience. This production evidenced the group's ongoing commitment to create the best possible opportunities for all group members to develop their talents and pursue their ambitions in professional fringe theatre settings. Like most of our productions, these two important performances were captured on video for our archive.

Girl Talk



Festive Stockings

It's Christmas Jim, but not as we know it ...

After 'Flaming Crackers' last year, another collection of short, seasonal plays to brighten a bleak midwinter Following two highly successful previous collaborations with Nevertheless Productions in July 2012 and December 2012, Stepping Out Theatre collaborated with Nevertheless Productions for a third time to present this special follow up Xmas event in Frome and Bristol in December 2013. 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 including group Trustee Emma Staddon.

These script in hand and fully produced performances featured local actor Kim Hicks and Stepping Out regulars Danann McAleer and Gerard Cooke as well as Associate Artist Olivia Dennis. They were directed by Stepping Out Associate Director Chris Loveless.

Girl Talk

For two nights only at the Alma Tavern Theatre, we presented a double bill of hilarious, moving and dramatic female monologues written by two of the country's leading writers at the peak of their powers, but a generation apart.

Alan Bennett's 'Her Big Chance' (1987) from the classic 'Talking Heads' series tells the story of Lesley, an aspiring actress whose exciting new role in a film for the West German market turns out to be a little more than it first appeared.

Jack Thorne's 'Bunny' (2010) (Fringe First, Edinburgh Festival) describes an exhilarating coming of age for Katie, caught up in a terrifying white knuckle ride across a Luton council estate.

Performers Chrissie Harmer and Emma Staddon had both appeared regularly in large scale Stepping Out Theatre productions at the Brewery Theatre. Each was making a debut





Media Monsters

If we create monsters, then we should fear what they show us about ourselves ...

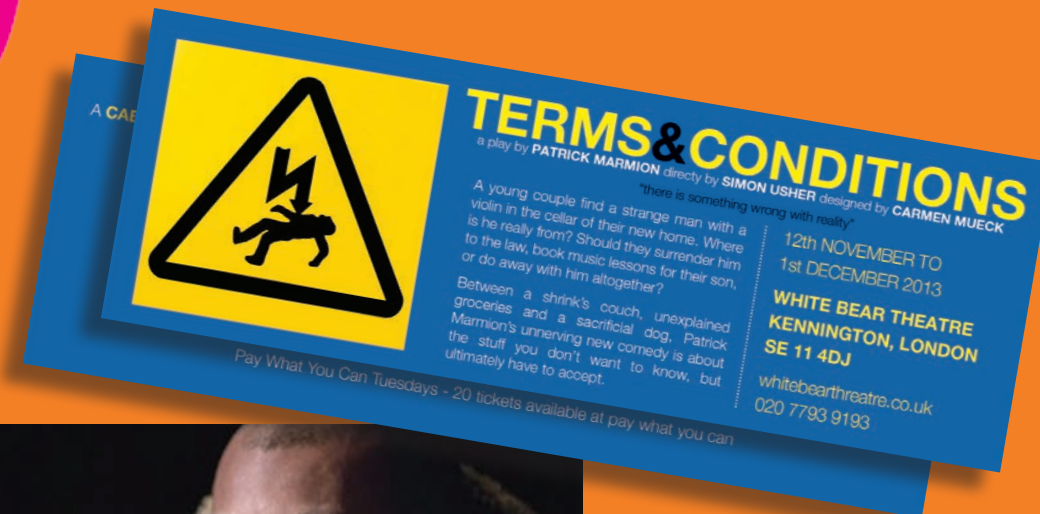
'My Big Fat TV Bitch' by Rosie Finnegan explored how reality television helps to both feed and create an insatiable public appetite for monsters. 'Fixing It,' by Crysse Morrison was a psychological drama about changing sexual mores and eroding personal ideals, unfolding under the shadow of Jimmy ('The Beast') Saville.

These were two dark, funny and challenging one act plays about some very modern monsters ...

Following on from our production of her play 'Mascara' in 2012, this was Stepping Out Theatre's second co-production of a play by Crysse Morrison who currently heads up our long term collaborators Dreamweavers in Frome. The production again featured Associate Artist Olivia Dennis in a leading role and it was directed by Marc Geoffrey who also ran the Stepping Out Devising for Performance group this year. Two performances in Frome and ten in Bristol garnered some very enthusiastic audience feedback



Media Monsters



Terms and Conditions
Photo: Alastair Muir



Terms and Conditions

National theatre critic Patrick Marmion's new play was a haunting, hilarious and poignant fable about the place of the outsider in contemporary society. The play's highly original blend of fantasy, dream, social comment, existential drama and allegory encouraged audiences to think about mental health in a very different way. We were proud to help bring this exciting piece of new writing to the London stage in our fourth production to take place at the White Bear in Kennington.

Sweet Release

'Sweet Release' was the first one act play by Stepping Out Trustee Emma Staddon. It was shortlisted in a national young people's scriptwriting competition run by The Ashton Group who are based in Barrow – in – Furness. After script development by the Ashton Group and Stepping Out Theatre, and two days of rehearsals, the play was given a staged reading to an invited audience at St. Werburgh's Community Centre. The reading was directed by Associate Director Chris Loveless and the cast included Associate Artist Olivia Dennis, Trustee Jasmine Darke and long term member Chrissie Harmer.

Feedback from Audiences

Here is a selection of what audience members said about six of our eight productions in 2013 - 14. You can read all the feedback on our website.

HERMIONE STEEL AND THE ISLAND OF LOST MINDS

Amazing, courageous work – funny, moving and thought provoking. As an audience member, you can feel how the work is grounded in real experiences, giving the results real authenticity.

Wild! Exuberant! Colourful! Crazy! Zestful! Energising! Hilarious! Brilliant!

Absolutely spot on. Just what the doctor ordered! Totally original, fantastic acting, loved the dancing. When's the tour? Televisé it!

Thought it was brilliant! Liked acting when I was a kid – made me want to do it again. Maybe in the future. Loved it.

I loved Paul the Polar Bear / Dog. Amazing and thought – provoking performance!

Amazing show! Loved Paul! Give him my number!

Best show ever. Keep them coming.

I thought the show was incisive and well thought out. There were some good lines and helpful hints as to what is in store for this company of actors. Well done.

Yet another brilliant Stepping Out show. Well done to the whole cast, you were amazing! Can't wait for the next show!

Great evening out. Muchly enjoyed it. Great production. First time in this theatre. Will come again.

Excellent show. Really, really enjoyed it. Can't wait to see next year's. FANTASTIC. Make up brilliant. Very, very funny.

That was totally awesome. Where did you find those characters? Make up amazing, especially at the end.

Second Stepping Out show I've seen and it was as enjoyable as the first. Lots going on, lots of laughs and smiles. Well done to all involved – was particularly taken by the striking dame in the red patent heels.

Lots of fun and frolics! Great to see the performance! Loves the music and dance! Good vibes all round! THANKS. P.S. Mindsweepers were inspired!

As one of Gill's sisters, I found the play both very enjoyable and sometimes very moving. I'm sure Gill was looking down on you all and having a right good laugh as she loved Stepping Out. I would like to thank you all very much for dedicating this night to her. God bless you all, Gill's sister Tina and Chris.

A lovely tribute to our dear sister / mum / auntie – Gill Amphlett. Well done to all. It was very hard to tell who were the professionals / amateurs. Gill's family xx

Wonderful evening. Really enjoyed it. Wonderful way to celebrate a life. Loved the headbanging!

Really lovely show. Thanks. Love, Kerry (Gill's daughter) x

Absolutely incredible performance – heartfelt, funny, moving, passionate! Thank you for letting us be a part of your journey. I won't forget it. P.s. AMAZING COSTUMES!!

I've seen many Stepping Out performances over the years, but this year's touched me on a very deep level. I think it was the interconnectedness between the players, and there was so much warmth, affection and a feeling of community which really transmitted to the audience. Also wit, fast pace, infectious energy, colour, poignant moments and fun. It really lifted my spirits. And Terry was fab!

Wonderful – warm, funny, deep, colourful, inclusive, profound. More please.

Absolutely fantastic. I was really touched. Great balance of comedy and true emotion. Loved it, really did.

A journey into the unknown filled with love and hope and magic moments. Thanks for a fab evening.

Amazing performance by a talented and gifted cast. A beautiful tribute to a past member, was incredibly moving.

I loved every minute of your play – it took me to such magic and colourful places and you were all brilliant. Thank you!

One of the best things I have seen for ages. Such a great dialogue on mental health issues : -)

Thank you! It was great to see a positive dialogue on mental health. Fun, but also educating about an important topic. We should all be talking about mental health. Get it out of the shadows and end stigma!

Fantastic show! A real team effort, absolutely brilliant, all of your individuality shone through, which made it thoroughly enjoyable. Gill was obviously a fantastic person and meant a lot to you. Thank you xx

Great fun, some fantastic characters, and a brilliant example of involving everyone. Had a fab evening!

Brilliant show – very funny – lovely tribute to Gill. Dog / Polar Bear and Dorothea were very funny. Can't wait for next year.

You had to sit back and let it happen! Took a while to understand what was going on, but everyone, cast and audience, enjoying themselves so much is catching! Very impressed by the number of lines everyone (mostly correctly) remembered, and I really enjoyed the show. Thanks.

Thank you for a fantastic evening! Not only was it entertaining, but insightful and uplifting too. You created a welcoming atmosphere in which we could reflect and be challenged. Thanks again.

I didn't know what to expect – it's my first time. It was thought provoking, very professional and I really enjoyed it. Such a big workload and so brilliantly performed by you all. Thank you.

I was scared when the Mindsweeper came on. I was panicking. It was good when the dog came on.

It was really funny. I want to come next time.



Hermione Steel

One of the most profoundly moving, funny and brilliant performances I've ever had the pleasure of watching. The atmosphere you all created throughout was beautiful and stunning.

A fantastic performance, I loved it! Such a bright and performance. Enjoyed it so much! Hope you all enjoyed performing as much as I enjoyed the performance. ; -)

Great stuff! Loved the costumes! Imagery of ocean – loved it. Really touching memories of Gill, lovely touch. Look forward to more productions.

Fantastic production. Nice mandolin. Emma's best role and I'd pay again just to see TJ in those leather pants. I shed a tear or two to the memory of Gill, but in a good way.

Fabulous darlings! Such fun and energy – all extremely entertaining and some wonderful performances – especially Terry and Piers. Look forward to the next one!

What a treat!. Great commitment and colour and energy from the whole cast. It's always so impressive to see that many bodies on stage who seem to know what they're doing. Must be a good cat herding director at the helm! The story had its own mad logic but never lost us and made us laugh. The gentle and

heartfelt tributes to Gill were very movingly woven through the production and highlighted the whole point of the company and its wonderful work.

I really enjoyed the production and so did my friend. It was brilliantly funny and really touching as I thought it would be. The references to mental health were really spot on. I found the ending incredibly sad, you could really feel the emotion in everyone's voices.

It was simply brilliant ... I loved all the characters. Everyone, each character, has their own personality, well enforced through words and body language. Well done guys. Just loved it. Mark ... you will always surprise me. You're so brilliant.

Well done! Good fun with a social and mental health message. Thanks!

Excellent. Never knew what was coming next. Everyone in the cast enjoyed and participated and gave a lot of thought provoking.

This was my first Stepping Out show. I was extremely impressed! The main characters were very strong, very humorous and very well acted. The idea behind the show was very unique. I felt that the portrayal of mental health issues was very realistic. Everything was brilliant!

Good work!

What an interesting way to explore such a complex topic – light and playful. Lots of changes to keep up with and keep energy focussed on. I don't know how the cast managed to keep track of the character changes, coming in and out of The Collective Subconscious to 'Reality' and back. You made mental health issues something relevant to everyone without making it heavy. I applaud your achievement!

A lot of fun! Lovely memories of a member you have lost. Lots of laughs and plenty of talent! Thanks for a wonderful night. Here's to the future FOR EVERYONE.

I thought it had absolutely brilliant moments of comedy – I was the one laughing loudest – but also moments of moving real theatre. I haven't seen much community theatre and this was a great introduction. Loved the dog, Dorothea and Dwayne!

A lot of fun! Lovely memories of a member you have lost. Lots of laughs and plenty of talent! Thanks for a wonderful night. Here's to the future FOR EVERYONE.

Really wonderful combination of people and ideas – a community effort, bringing in EVERYONE. Collective subconscious – I LOVE IT! So true! Thank you!

The Dwaynes World scene was surprisingly surreal in a fantastic way. The natural feel of it and the character interaction drew you into it brilliantly. Even though I laughed constantly throughout, it was genuinely moving. I'm really grateful for the experience.

Outstanding performances by all! Great wit and good humour, Stepping Out lives on and will long into the future.

Lots of colour, energy, music and dancing joy. The cast looked like they really enjoyed it. I particularly liked the references to what mental health workers are and exploring their representation on stage, and also the parts of the show that felt they were a true reflection of the casts' experience of 'dancing with death vs. Life'. The reflections on Gill's death and life were very moving. Would love to have seen more of the play devised by the cast.

Gill would have been so proud to see you all up there doing your stuff! As was I. A great show, lots of emotion and full of fun. A perfect combination as always!

Fabulously over the top, loved it – especially belly dancers (totally random) and Dorothea. Brilliant, great antidote after a crap week.

Absolutely LOVED IT! Touching, accessible and thoroughly enjoyable! Thank you!

I really liked the way it explored so many issues – the feelings of loss and completion, childhood memories and impacts. I like the way it allows professionals and amateurs to mix in a healing environment ... and the healing that must provide.

Very enjoyable and entertaining. The dances were very good and should be a bigger part. Plot was a bit random, but was still good fun to watch.

I think this is the best since 'Wilmot'. I particularly appreciated the integration of the Arabic dancers – important if you are going to involve them. Well done on the economic sets and costumes.



... I have mental illness in my family and my daughter has bipolar ... so there's my interest! We were so impressed. ...There was some amazing acting in there. We laughed out loud and shed tears – that's what good theatre is all about. It was obvious that the cast were loving every minute and their support for each other was palpable. What a wonderful, supportive group – so much so that we realised that people were referring to their own experiences as part of the show. Very brave. Stepping Out Theatre must be a hugely therapeutic experience for all involved. It was funny, moving and humbling.

Fabulous! Laughed out loud and shed a tear – performed with passion and courage – well done all. Inspiring. Thank you. Xx

Great esprit di corps! Wonderful last night!

A wonderful continuation and development from last year's show. Hugely enjoyable, though also very moving in parts. Another fantastically valuable show, full of important messages, but above all, entertaining!

Really good! Very clever involvement of the whole theatre company. Also enjoyed the contemporary references and the mix of factual and fictional characters.

The true essence of theatre. The true meaning of fun. Thanks for a wonderful performance. Hope you keep working in the same vein. Wonderful, joyful ...

Really enjoyed it and loved the play within a play aspect. Really thought – provoking with great sentiments. Everything theatre should be. A little too loud for me in places.

The show was extremely enjoyable. This is the second production of yours that I have seen. I go away and take so much with me. Would definitely recommend. Thank you.

Great energy, great acting, lots of laughs – loved it! Gonna be reciting Paul the Polar Bear's lines for a long time methinks! Wish I'd seen it last year. Came all the way from Essex to watch. Thank you all! Xxx

Some excellent concepts about finding what you have lost and recovery.

Fantastic. I really enjoyed it and everyone's contribution. Genuinely funny, especially the cross dressing contributions of Mrs. Bilston and Piers the Director.

My first time at Stepping Out – wow! A heartfelt and wonderfully produced show. See you next year!

DIARY OF A MADMAN

I wouldn't generally enthuse about incredibly powerful, emotional performance. Excellent production that was spot on the mark with the script. Incredible energy, I would love to see another!

Brilliant, moving, funny, compelling. An excellent adaptation and a riveting performance. Thought provoking about the treatment and perception of mental ill health.

Fabulous production – really moved and impressed by great acting, adaptation and set.

Very intense performance ... excellent.

Very enjoyable and compulsive viewing – will come back for more.

What an intense production. A fascinating portrait of the disintegration of sanity in a human being. Well done!

Wonderful performance ...

Great performance. Very convincing and covered some important issues.

Tour de force. Touching evocation of the psychotic experience. More moving because of psychosis in our family. Steeled our resolve to stand by the psychotic member of the family come what may.

Words fail me ... what a wonderful performance. I was totally spellbound throughout. Felt so full of pity for the character portrayed ...

Never seen Gogol in the theatre before ... a moving and intense performance. Really enjoyed it.

Great! At times I could not work out whether I wanted to laugh or cry.

Brilliant ...

Marvellous ... Poignant and the stuff of the heart and soul of life. Excellent performance.

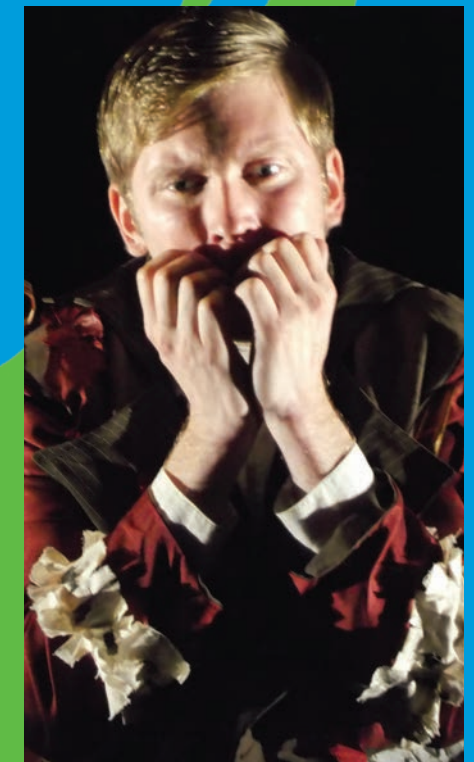
Beautifully elegant ...

Excellent performance, directing and adaptation. Really enjoyed it ...

Brilliant show, great acting and writing and amazing venue. Very moving piece, disturbing, real and thought – provoking. Wonderful to see so many service users getting their first experience of theatre. Proper inclusive stuff.

Really enjoyed. An absolutely convincing and powerful portrayal of madness, comic and tragic. What a talent!

Brilliantly done and acted. Very moving and enjoyed watching it. Thank you.



Great, disturbing, euphoric. A great study of mental illness. Insightful.

Great performance – incredible! Good portrayal, warm and comical, sad and scary.

Wonderful – I thought there but for the grace of God ... Theatrical tour de force. Really good depiction of descent into madness.

Really enjoyed it – the time flew by. Thank you.

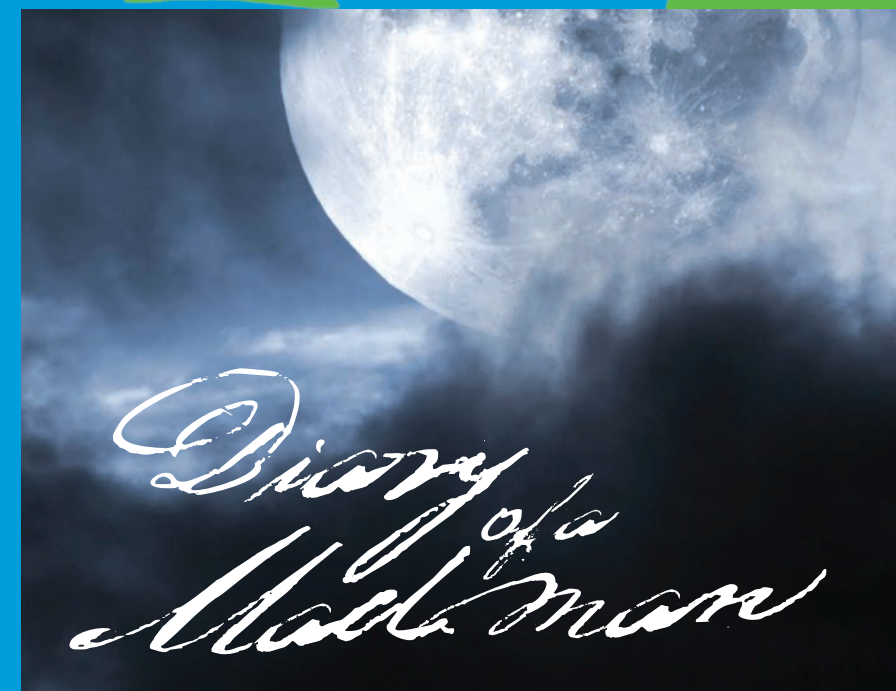
Very moving. I felt sorry for him when he was in the asylum. Very good. A great play.

Very talented madman. Very sad portrayal of the descent into madness.

... fucking amazing! Brought a tear to my eye.

Watching Poprishchin's descent into madness was an eye opener – the ego and the gradual loss of control towards the end was enlightening and insightful into mental health. Well done – very brave!

Really enjoyed performance ... great atmosphere ... acting was superb.



GIRL TALK

Fantastically rich characters and scripts. Superbly acted and directed.

Extremely well acted. Very current topics sensitively addressed. Loved it. Thank you.

They both remembered a lot. I have seen them doing monologues before, but not this long. Well done Chrissie and Emma.

The first word that springs to mind is "CONGRATULATIONS".

I thought the show on Sunday night was wonderful and as a professional actor who has performed a one-woman show (Shirley Valentine), I know the pressure of the responsibility of having no-one but yourself to create the scene, various characters, the single emotional journey, not to mention the amount of dialogue to learn and I would just like to say that I thought Chrissie and Emma did all of the above just beautifully. What a feat! Lovely performances and I can't say how much I was impressed that when a line was requested, neither of them flinched, it was a though it were part of the scene and they returned to the piece without the slightest wavering of confidence. That is quite amazing! I feel the work that 'Stepping Out' does is absolutely tremendous and I would like to thank all involved for a truly entertaining and lovely evening in the theatre.

Another great production from Stepping Out! The performances had amazing energy and characters! I loved it. Well done to both of you!!

It was excellent! Great acting and an awful lot of dialogue to remember. Well done!

Utterly fantastic. Both plays were absorbing and funny.



Girl Talk

A brilliant evening of theatre. Two unforgettable characters brought brilliantly to life with skill, subtlety and warmth by the two actors. I hope we see more of these two!

Brilliant, especially second piece. Talented actors given space and time to develop.

A very successful evening. Both actors did a great job and held the audience. Well done all round.

Well directed and full of energy right to the end. Both girls looked and acted the part.

Highly entertaining and amusing, thoroughly enjoyed it. Totally mind boggling how they could memorise so much. Can't wait to see some more.

Just amazing both. Chrissie lovely comic timing, very enjoyable! And Emma, what a marathon, just fantastic! Very comic, but well played in the darker bits too.

Just want to say what a WONDERFUL evening we had on Sunday! We really enjoyed the two plays so much! Chrissie & Emma performed brilliantly! So expressive and so professional - captivating the audience and drawing us completely into their worlds! The whole production was a huge tribute to the amazing work of 'Stepping Out'! Having performed with the company myself, it was so wonderful to see how Chrissie & Emma have blossomed into such amazing actors! Well done girls!! Looking forward to the next play!

I thought that both performances were amazing! Hard to believe these are not trained actors. Funny, touching and so watchable. Lovely sense of dramatic pace and comic timing by both actors.

MEDIA MONSTERS

Fantastically rich characters and scripts. Superbly acted and directed.

Extremely well acted. Very current topics, sensitively addressed. Loved it, thank you.

'Molly' in the first play is a fabulously authentic voice – very powerful characterisation. Really enjoyed the second play – lots of depth, seamless shifts from past to present. Sexy and thoughtful. Loved the music, atmosphere and clothes.

Thoroughly enjoyed both plays! Loved the theatre and cosiness. Ten out of ten!

More like this please! Snappy acting and pithy writing. Cute miniature theatre that makes you feel like you are in a big one.

It was the best play I've seen in a while and some of the dialogue echoed discussions I've been having with friends on that subject.

Congratulations on your production. I liked 'Fixing It' and thought the idea was clever and well executed with a strong performance from the elder guy.

Thoroughly enjoyed the performances of Media Monsters on Tuesday at the Alma Tavern. Great fun, great writing and a quality production from a talented cast. Totally surpassed my expectations. A wet Tuesday night in January well spent .

Loved how the audience is involved and drawn in even before 'curtain up'. I thought it was a shame Glen did not get more comeuppance. The preconceptions weren't challenged adequately for my liking. I really loved watching 'Fixing It' – I was swept up – the acting was lovely, the moral dilemmas intriguing. Thanx!

I saw the production on wednesday at the Alma Tavern. I found the first play OK. It was thought provoking subject matter but I found the characters lacked a little dimension and credibility. The second play on the other hand had me hooked from the first minute. The relationships were tender and poignant with a fantastic use of music as a thread throughout. Great little piece of writing and directing.

Very good production, thought provoking, well acted and well written. I thought the TV host character was overplayed, but otherwise a good night out.

Both plays fantastic and all four actors fantastic. Enjoyable and thoughtful drama. Fantastic direction of the dovetailing between the younger and the older couple in the second play.

PLAY 1; Excellent actress in the presenter, loved the constant switching of sympathies and the immersive format. PLAY 2; Extremely evocative, excellent example of real life lack of black and white, very pertinent examination of changing attitudes.

Really enjoyed 'Fixing It'. Lots to think about. Intelligent writing. Especially liked the last scene – a glimpse of their innocence.

Fixing It – loved the time travel and handling of a difficult issue and its many layers, and the development of the characters over the years gap. Reminded me of 'Mascara' connecting the bigger issue with a personal experience echoing. The sets were great ... Enjoyed a lot of the acting, subtle and layered ... These are difficult issues and the plays didn't overdo them to the point where they are too painful for people with direct experiences.

Thought provoking pieces exploring how we can seek to impose our morals on others, or rather our judgements about others' morals.

I thoroughly enjoyed both shows. The second had particular relevance about using current values to judge previous actions or events. Far more thought provoking than an evening with the TV. This is a fantastic introduction to theatre.

The first play was very entertaining and had an interesting debate with the 'Esther Ransome' character every bit as bad as the TV she condemns. The second play had a great deal of atmosphere and it was very interesting to hear a debate on contemporary issues seen through the eyes of the past. Great music and costumes!

Thoroughly enjoyed both plays. Acting and interpretation good and very thought – provoking. Will definitely come again and spread the news. Well done.

Really wished that Molly asked Glen how happy she was with her life and pushed her for an answer. Felt the second play was very thought provoking ... a very good evening thanks.

"beautifully complex" – seamless production



Media Monsters



Loved 'Fixing It', great performances from all the actors, and could really believe the older and younger versions of each character.

Excellent. 'Fixing It' was sensitive and the performers truthful and completely mesmerising. Superb cast. A wonderful evening. More please.

Really enjoyed both plays, each of them uncomfortable + entertaining & thought provoking

Powerful & nuanced – riveting

Good contrast – first satirical, second original with dramatic development, thoughtful and very powerful.

Admiration on how well both dealt with difficult subjects

Very moving. Very real. You feel part of the action. Modern Shakespeare.

Very professional and thought-provoking – a month's discussion material.

Wonderful, both of them. Glad to find such talent in such an unexpected place.

Excellent. The thematic underscoring was very well pitched. Not too overbearing, but ever-present. Fantastic performances, (especially the 'mirroring' of the two couples in play two.) Neither playwright seemed to push an overt message onto the audience. This we particularly enjoyed and will keep us talking!

Very good – meaty and complex material, excellent performances FANTASTIC. Brill. Very amusing and lots of kissing. Shocking!

Amazing viewing! Acting was really powerful. Thought-provoking. Thank you, travelled from Glastonbury and was well worth the drive.

The second play tackled a complicated subject and portrayed it extremely well, fantastic writing, good acting and directing. BRAVO

A terrific evening – thought-provoking material, great acting (and jokes!)

First visit to the Alma – will definitely visit again, and look out for Stepping Out!

First-rate writing ~ looking forward to next time!

SWEET RELEASE

It was amazing! Prompted me to revisit my own writing.

It was interesting

Very well written. Powerful performances.

Really really good. Thought provoking and very well written.

Very emotional – I couldn't move. Very raw.

Amazing, Really great.

Emotionally inspiring – it stays with you. Incredible acting.

Very thought provoking.

A tour-de-force!

I admired its raw honesty.

It made me cry! It was.... real.

Had some genuinely scary and some very funny moments!

Inspirational to watch. I was amazed

Feedback from Performers

A selection from some of the comments by service users who took part in our productions in 2013 – 14 about what they got from their involvement with Stepping Out Theatre

I got a lot out of this production and was glad to be a part of it. The most touching part of this production was the support from the rest of the cast including how a mental health crisis brought out the best in this support. Ths show helped me to deal with feelings about Gill and was a safe and fitting way to pay tribute to a lovely person.

Being another character in front of a large audience is a big achievement and I got a lot out of it. The most moving part of it for me was doing the scene about Gill. It was very sad and emotional, but good.

Once again I learned that I am often wrong about how things are going to turn out. Through fear, I can't let go of control. I think these shows often teach me how to let go and trust. Also I have learned that I need to take more time out in life.

I think it helped to be remembering Gill in a collective and public way rather than only in private. I am enjoying performing again, helped by being in a big group of people all supporting each other.

What I got out of being in the show was a sense of community and of family. Also a great sense of achievement, especially when difficulties were encountered and overcome. Also a sense of how important the group and the annual show is to so many people. I felt the long, slow, thorough process of rehearsal dovetailed perfectly with the emotional journey we all had to go on around Gill's death. The play helped us to accept fully her passing, reflect on her life and what she meant to us, to mourn and to celebrate, to laugh and to shed a few tears, to heal and to move on.

The most moving thing for me was the amount of support the group gave to me after my boyfriend died. I think I would have lost it without the group and the show. Reading the feedback from Gill's family also brought a tear to my eye. The show gave me more confidence in myself and who I was. I got support and love and that's all I could ask for really.

It was a big moment for me wearing my Egyptian costume bought 5 years ago, feeling good in it, and spreading my wings with no apologies for the space I took up. I think Gill would have really loved the show and the notion of putting on a show that gives everyone a voice. It was a very poignant and fitting tribute.

It's good to be part of the extended family of Stepping Out, although it is dysfunctional! I enjoyed getting the audience laughs from my parts.

It was a great experience being part of a team, working with many different people all with one goal. I enjoyed being able to contribute to the whole and seeing people develop their skills. The tribute was very moving and joyous and celebrated Gill's positives.

I got a real sense of camaraderie and I felt really supported during the actual performances. I got a real sense of achievement because I had more lines this year – it was a really good challenge for me. I really enjoyed actually performing to the audiences. It also helped me to come to terms with Gill's death because it was a great tribute to her and it was a reminder of what an amazing person she was.

I loved the whole process of being in the play. Watching the script come to life and how the characters developed. For me, being in the play fulfilled my passion for dance and gave me the opportunity to develop my hidden desire to perform which for many years was affected by a lack of confidence. I felt able to do this amongst a great group of supportive and caring people. I was absolutely thrilled to be asked to be in the play so a huge "THANKYOU" to all at Stepping Out.

Hermione Steel



I was very nervous to start with but gained confidence through team work and support during the rehearsals. The play dealt with Gill's death in a sensitive and moving way whilst being respectful to her memory and her family and friends.

So many people complimented me on my performances both in rehearsal and during the production. I've always enjoyed being onstage, but never really feel I am terribly good. It was so nice to be supported and encouraged.

Working with Stepping Out has greatly advanced my professional standard and increased my opportunities. I have learned a great deal from working with actors and directors, who have a lot more experience than myself, in Stepping Out productions. This has transformed my whole approach to my work into a much more productive one.

Previously my depression has knocked my confidence and prevented me from functioning as well as I could. This has also had a great deal of financial implication, which has then restricted me as an actor. Stepping Out has opened up so many doors. I can now afford

more classes, to go to any London audition (this was expensive before as I am travelling from Bristol) and my Equity, Spotlight and Casting Call Pro subs. In addition, I am a great deal more confident professionally as a result of my experiences and education from working with this company.

Being in more regular work and becoming more accomplished within my work, as a result of working with Stepping Out, has greatly contributed to relieving my depression. I now feel there is much more meaning to my life, now that I am able to participate in the work that I love regularly. It has also, greatly helped my confidence and self-worth. Also, in large part, addressing, exploring and expressing mental health issues as part of the work has had huge therapeutic value. Overall, Stepping Out has turned my difficulties from the past from a hindrance into a positive influence on my work and life.

It was moving everyone rallying together to help each other out. I experienced a sense of fulfilment and achievement. It was very rewarding.



Reviews

A selection from some of this year's reviews*

Patrick Marmion's new play is an intriguing mixture of domestic realism and the surreal. It raises a lot of issues about friendship, attitudes to strangers—especially immigrants from different cultures, domestic trust, hide-bound psychiatry and what people will accept if it proves to be to their advantage, but, at its heart, this is a play that questions values and the nature of reality itself. With Jennie Gruner playing Kat as a young woman on the edge of a nervous breakdown, Jermaine Dominique a self-questioning Walter, James Thorne and Victoria Walsh as his builder mate Les (who changes jobs to an establishment-representing security man) and his girlfriend Liz who is about to become a life-counsellor-come-shrink, it is strongly cast.

Howard Loxton in British Theatre Guide

... combines kitchen – sink naturalism with satirical absurdism, widening its scope by turns until it touches, rarely for a modern drama, on theological and existential questions. Sometimes it sounds contrived, at points its baffling, but it's consistently stimulating ...

Dominic Cavendish in the Daily Telegraph

It's hard to imagine a more timely play than Crysse Morrison's *Fixing It*, half of a double bill presented by Stepping Out Theatre at the Alma Tavern in Bristol.

This deeply thought-provoking play shines a spotlight on the complex and conflicting thoughts that many "children of the sixties" must be having in the wake of the "Savile and others" investigations.

The generation that thought it had discovered a new morality and a new way to live, and seems now to have diluted and transmuted into a society with little or no moral compass, is left in scarifying questioning of what is or is not right, and what was or was not right.

The audience meets Kate and Richard, in their 60s, and their younger selves Kat and Rick in THE 60s, when the Summer of Love brought them together in dreams of a different future from that of their parents. Richard, a gentle, compassionate and thoughtful man, angry at the idea of victims of St Jim and those charged with rapes and assaults in the investigations that surround his antics, is faced with a dilemma. Did his wife's one night of non-consensual sex (before she ever met him) make her a life-long victim?

... This uncomfortable play, set to a perfectly chosen pop soundtrack, captures the essence of both the 60s and the present day ... Brilliant performances by Paddy Navin and

Olivia Dennis as Kate and Robert Myler and Vincent Enderby as Richard take the audience (to many of whom the 60s is ancient history) into the hearts and souls of the protagonists.

The first of the two plays, Rosie Finnegan's *My Big Fat TV Bitch*, is a satire on the dog-eat-dog documentary exploration of "reality" TV.

Paddy Navin nails the ghastly and patronising presenter Glen, with all her hysterical hand gestures, to-camera grimacing and cod-psychology.

And Olivia Dennis balanced the naivety and truculence as the teenage Irish traveller who comes onto the programme to "tell it like it is" and ends up accidentally revealing the very thing about her life that would have delighted the makers of the fly-on-the-wall series in which she was one pawn.

It's only a pity that these two excellent short plays by Somerset writers can't get a wider audience – because this is the very time to see them. Nearly 24 hours later, we were still talking about them.

Gay Pirrie - Weir in the *Fine Times Recorder*

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

Poetry Work at Fromeside Clinic and Elsewhere

Recently, our work at Fromeside has focused on producing poetry anthologies by current and past Fromeside service users. The first by L. S. Kimberley – 'Selected Poems' was launched when we took part in two days of a 'Celebrating Fromeside' event where we invited 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 went on to publish his second anthology 'Picasso the Surrealist and Other Poems' 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.

Our third anthology of poetry to come out of Fromeside was 'Love's Gutter' by Thomas Glover which was edited by Crysse Morrison and launched in February 2014 with events at the Bristol Old Vic and the Square Club in Berkley Square. 'Love's Gutter' received this amazing series of endorsements from celebrity poets.

"There is painfully raw subject matter in these poems, but they contain it: using form, wry wit and even a kind of grave playfulness, with now and then a simile that makes you blink and see things anew, they are reaching towards the balance that art can offer, even when it is on a tightrope over a frightening drop."

Philip Gross, poet & playwright, winner of TS Eliot Poetry Prize 2009

"Thomas Glover's journey to wellness through writing is stark, truthful and moving. He catches hold of his disintegrating life through the strong power of turning destruction into creation, and reading his poetry, it seems that every word, every phrase, is first set down with the determination to tell his story, and then energised with the involvement of making - discovering joy in the process."

Rose Flint, internationally award-winning poet



"Poems with punch and verve that linger behind the eyes for hours."

Luke Wright, award-winning performance poet and broadcaster

"This is brave and startling writing. Thomas Glover is not afraid to tell it how it is."

Abigail Morley, award-winning poet and editor

"Suffering is shapeless and endless when we are in it. Once, however briefly, out of it we look to give it shape and meaning if only to map where we have been and might be again. Thomas Glover's poems are confessional in the sense that they speak out of direct personal experience but they are not confessions. A poem is an object you can stand away from and these are poems, coherent, moving, dramatically composed and, strange as it may seem, independent of the life that made them. It is their dramatic beauty, their shaping, that constitutes their being. There is always something miraculous about such shapes. Hence the poems."

George Szirtes, award-winning poet and writer, winner of TS Eliot prize 2005

"Poems from the gutter of love that search for the starlight with candour, dry humour and vivid imagery"

Elvis McGonagal

Stepping Out Theatre and Mind Your Music members have had an increasing presence at the regular poetry event run at the Square Club, Berkley Square by group members Charles Thompson. Several members have performed at this regular event.

We have also worked with Anna Saunders who is Director of the Cheltenham Poetry Festival and Anna is currently working with two group members towards the publication of new anthologies. Group member Charlie Ekpalo has performed at the Cheltenham Festival as part of her work with Anna.

Charlie Ekpalo reading her poetry at an event



Copies of all of the anthologies mentioned here are currently, or will be shortly available from the Stepping Out office. Thomas Glover's 'Love's Gutter' is also available on Amazon and as a Kindle download.





The Gill Amphlett Social Fund

The fund which enables us to offer subsidised and free theatre tickets and other social activities to group members comes from money raised by members during the Annual Sponsored Walk and Big Give Xmas Challenge. In 2013, this fund was renamed the Gill Amphlett Social Fund in memory of the group's first Social Secretary.

The group continues to run 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.

The highlight of this year's social calendar was a special trip to Cornwall to see two productions at the fabulous Minack Theatre. Our Annual Xmas get together was entertained by our second Xmas production. 'Festive Stockings' received two performances in Bristol and two in Frome and proved to be a great success again with group members and requests for it to be made a regular event, the last night in Bristol doubling as our Xmas Social.

We ran our usual series of trips to all the productions in the 2013 Theatre West season at the Alma Tavern Theatre, as well as other productions such as Kate Tempest's incredible 'Brand New Ancients' at the Bristol Old Vic.

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 Fromside 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. For the first time, Playback Theatre formed the focus of the feedback evening when members met to talk about, share and write about their experience of being in this year's large scale production 'Hermione Steel and the Island of Lost Minds.'

Devising for Performance Group

For the first time in 2013 – 14, we ran a 'Drama and Devising for Performance' group. It was the brainchild of local actor and director Marc Geoffrey and was run by him and Stepping Out Co – chair Kirsty Cox. It replaced the Dramatherapy group that had run for the previous two years. The group met regularly for a period of five months leading up to the creation of a new devised piece of drama which was performed in front of the whole Stepping Out Theatre company in March 2013. This popular and successful new group is scheduled to run again in 2014 – 15 after work on the next large scale production has finished.



Ernie Bell - Stepping Out - the Songs from the Shows 2002 - 2011, Terms and Conditions 2013

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.

In April 2013, Ernie launched another CD of his own music 'Terms and Conditions' in an event at the Grain Barge attended by many of his friends from Stepping Out Theatre and Mind Your Music.

Copies of both these CDs 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 Fromside 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 repeated in November 2012 when it was one of the last group activities that Gill Amphlett took part in. It was repeated for the third time in November 2013.

The Big Give Xmas Challenge 2013 raised a record – breaking amount of money for the group, and was actually our single largest item of income. The Xmas Challenge has now become a vital part of the group's finances, and along with the sponsored walk, a regular part of the group's calendar.

Stepping Out Theatre Online

Throughout 2007 – 14 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. During our busiest periods in and around production times, the website is updated daily and at all other times it is updated regularly. Postings are also made regularly on the Stepping Out Facebook page which can be found at; www.facebook.com/stepping.out.545.

The kind of information that can be found in both these places 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 - Associated Groups and Co-Producers

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 many years now 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 is currently awaiting a decision on its third three year Big Lottery Fund grant application. If successful, this would ensure 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 2017.

Mind Your Music

Ten years ago, Stepping Out Theatre supported a group of members to set up a dedicated mental health music organisation in Bristol which is now one of the leading groups in its field. Mind Your Music offer a busy programme of workshops and gigs throughout the year in addition to organising concerts, touring and recording CDs. In 2013 they were successful in a three year application to the Big Lottery Fund which created the first ever permanent paid worker for the group. After a lengthy selection and interview process, former Stepping Out Secretary Elliot Hall was the successful candidate and he started work in the three year post of Music Projects Manager in May 2013.

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 1999 – 2011' are available from the Stepping Out office, or from Mind Your Music.

Boil and Bubble

Former Chair of Stepping Out, Pameli 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 Frome-based group which runs a number of different creative projects with people in recovery from illness and traumatic experiences. Dreamweavers has been a regular co-producer on many Stepping Out Theatre productions, and has also been particularly involved in collaborating with Stepping Out on the work at Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital. They were the main producer for 'Media Monsters' in early 2014.

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. In September 2014, we will be co-producing a new musical with Fallen Angel Theatre with Chris Loveless directing, based on Thomas Hardy's classic novel 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' at the New Wimbledon Theatre.

Healing Arts Unlimited

In 2013, Stepping Out were instrumental in setting up Healing Arts Unlimited, a new organisation whose mission is to nurture self-expression, self-discovery, healing and personal growth using an eclectic mix of different art forms, drama, dance and guided imagery. The group offers a chance to access the unique world of your own creativity, imagination and spirit for healing. Healing Arts Unlimited works with people in recovery from illness and traumatic experiences in Bristol and rural Somerset.

Arts Etcetera

Arts ETC ('Empowerment Through Creativity'), are a new community theatre group based in Kidderminster who work with mental health service users and people with learning difficulties. We were instrumental in supporting and setting up this new group and their first production will take place at the Kidderminster Arts Festival in 2014 with some input from Stepping Out Theatre.

Financial Report and Accounts 2013/14

In the financial year 2013 / 14, the group received a total of £162,573 in income, and spent a total of £148,868. As might be expected in a year when we mounted a record breaking number of productions, these figures showed our highest ever turnover as a group.

This was the first year of new three year grant from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Big Lottery Fund. The Big Lottery Fund are funding the Project Co – ordinator and Deputy Project Co – ordinator posts up until March 2016. The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation are funding other core costs and production costs over the same period.

2013 / 14 was the last year of a crucial Comic Relief grant which has made a huge difference to the amount of work we could do with service users in individual productions over the last three years. We are currently awaiting the result of a new three year funding application to Comic Relief.

An important new stream of income over the previous two years was the Big Give Xmas Challenge, and we built on our previous success with this method of fundraising to raise our largest amount ever this year. For the first time this year, The Big Give became our single biggest source of income, raising a grand total of just over £58k for the group from a series of fundraising activities and a very generous group of individual donors.

As usual, the largest items of expenditure were salaries and payments to the freelance artists and service users involved in our most ambitious programme of productions. Together, these accounted for over 50% of expenditure.

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. This amount of unrestricted reserves was maintained for the two subsequent years, and in 2013 – 14, for the fourth year running, we ended the year with unrestricted reserves of £17,659.73 which is just over 10% of our 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 2013 - 28th February 2014

Section A - Receipts

Receipts (Restricted)	Restricted	Unrestricted	2013-2014	2012- 2013
Lankelly Chase Grant	0.00		0.00	15,000.00
Big Lottery Fund Grant (1)	40,000.00		40,000.00	16,882.00
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (2)	25,000.00		25,000.00	22,334.00
Arts Council Grant for the Arts (3)	9,000.00		9,000.00	0.00
Network For Social Change	0.00		0.00	14,820.00
Comic Relief (4)	15,000.00		15,000.00	10,000.00
Music Workers-Mind Your Music (5)	12,198.90		12,198.90	0.00
Big Give Xmas Challenge - Donations (6)		58,848.00	58,848.00	39,601.66
Box Office Receipts		151.88	151.88	414.00
Payments for Performances (7)		1,300.00	1,300.00	0.00
Interest and Refunds		677.00	677.00	76.13
TOTAL	101,198.90	60,976.88	162,175.78	119,127.79

Section B - Payments

Receipts (Restricted)	Restricted	Unrestricted	2013-2014	2012- 2013
Payroll	46,020.57	0.00	46,020.57	35,735.45
Rent (incl Theatre Hire)	3,383.00	1,782.13	5,165.13	5,274.05
General Running Expenses	0.00	7,934.44	7,934.44	7,427.44
Miscellaneous Production Costs	19,000.00	21.15	19,021.15	8,996.20
Training	0.00	1,026.65	1,026.65	2,324.84
Travel for Staff and Volunteers	0.00	9,488.33	9,488.33	5,270.94
Subsistence	0.00	6,053.43	6,053.43	4,346.73
Promotional Materials	0.00	1,334.20	1,334.20	1,981.30
Theatre Trips	0.00	2,208.25	2,208.25	3,172.00
Charitable Donations	0.00	1,800.00	1,800.00	2,020.00
Workshop Leader Fees	0.00	3,906.00	3,906.00	3,454.44
Freelance Workers and Artists	23,795.33	20,717.73	44,513.06	40,643.41
Net Fixed Assets	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL	92,198.90	56,272.31	148,471.21	120,646.80

Section C - Balance Sheet

Receipts (Restricted)	Restricted	Unrestricted	2013-2014	2012- 2013
Bank Balance at Start of Year	0.00	12,969.26	12,969.26	14,488.27
Bank Receipts	101,198.90	60,976.88	162,175.78	119,127.79
Bank Payments	-92,198.90	-56,272.31	-148,471.21	-120,646.80
Bank Balance at End of Year	9,000.00	17,673.83	26,673.83	12,969.26
Cash Balance at Start of Year	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Receipts	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Payments	0.00	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	477.68	477.68	477.68
Sales	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Purchases	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Depreciation @ 50% per year	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Fixed Assets at End of Year	0.00	477.68	477.68	477.68
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	9,000.00	18,151.51	27,151.51	13,446.94

Section D - Notes

- 1) 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. Employing two Project Co - Ordinators and some rental costs associated with the work of the group.
- 2) 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. Funding productions and core work.
- 3) Restricted Fund Arts Council grant for production of 'Tess of the D'urbervilles' originally planned for 2013-14 but carried over for work in 2014-15.
- 4) 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 2013-14
- 5) Restricted Fund income from Mind Your Music for payroll services to Projects Manager and Freelance workers.
- 6) Funds raised in charitable donations throughout year and through participation in The Big Give Xmas Challenge. Treated as unrestricted income but with a special remit to meet general running costs and extra production costs during 2013-2014.
- 7) Payment to group for performing at mental health conference in London.

Section E - Approvals

Kirsty Cox (Co - Chair)
28th April 2014

Beverley Jackson (Independent Examiner)
28th April 2014

