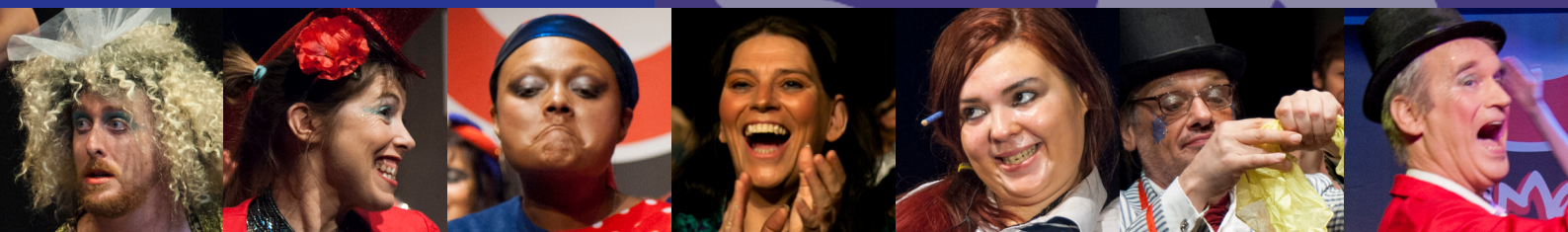


Stepping Out Theatre
**ANNUAL
REPORT
2014/15**

www.stepsingouttheatre.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

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Graphic Design by Ann Stiddard

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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.

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Beverley Jackson, 220 New Cheltenham Road, Kingswood,
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, 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 2014 – 15 was held at 7.00 p.m. on 23rd July 2014 at St. Werburgh's Community Centre, Horley Road, St. Werburgh's, Bristol. The following nine trustees were elected to serve a period of twelve months or until the next AGM.

Trustees 2010 - 2011

Kirsty Cox – Co-Chair

Tom Collis – Co-Chair

Danann McAleer – Secretary

Mark Breckon – Treasurer

Alison Comley – Trustee

Charles Thompson – Trustee

Tom Jones – Trustee

Emma Staddon – Trustee

Marc Geoffrey – 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

2014 – 15 was the second year of our latest three year programme of work funded mainly by the Big Lottery Fund, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Comic Relief. This is Stepping Out Theatre's fifth three year project and the group continues to grow and thrive. We continue to produce a large amount of high quality theatre and provide a wider range of theatre – related activities with service users. In particular;

- The security of three years of funding enabled us to once again mount a large number of productions including one of our most ambitious, difficult and expensive projects ever.
- 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles', a full scale musical theatre adaptation of Hardy's novel had a four week run in London and earned some of the best reviews and audience feedback the company had ever received. As with 'Lullabies of Broadmoor' in 2011, this production showed that the company can mount massive, ambitious theatre productions where theatre professionals work alongside service users garnering critical and audience acclaim. A high quality recording of the show was made and is available from the Stepping Out office as a single CD (highlights), or double CD (complete show).
- 'Diary of a Madman' became the first Stepping Out production to travel abroad when it was performed at the Century Association in New York in December 2014.
- Alongside these productions, we ran dance and music workshops as well as the popular Drama and Devising for Performance workshop with Marc Geoffrey and Kirsty Cox. This group devised and performed two new pieces of drama for the rest of the Company during the year.
- The Gill Amphlett Social Fund laid on a busy series of theatre trips and a large three day summer outing to 'Beyond The Border', the International Storytelling Festival at St. Donat's in Wales where 20 members camped out for three nights for this fabulous event in the glorious surroundings of St. Donat's castle.
- Cabaret events showcasing short pieces featuring individual members have been successfully revived by new Associate Director Marc Geoffrey and two highly popular cabaret events were organised for the AGM in July and the Xmas social in December.
- The Stepping Out / Chrysalis Theatre Playback Theatre Group continues to recruit new members and mount public performances.
- 'Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness' was this year's large scale production. This was our fifth commission for a full length play from Mark Breckon. We mounted 9 performances at The Brewery Theatre in Bristol and the Rondo Theatre in Bath.
- Two 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 2014 – 15, including on one new co – production.

- We also mounted co productions with Dreamweavers, Fallen Angel, Coffee House and Partisan Theatre.
- We continued to work with a number of poets towards a large scale event planned for 2015 when we will publish four new anthologies of poetry by local service users. The Director of the Cheltenham Poetry Festival and other local poets and writers are working with us on this project.
- 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 are currently developing two new Arts Council funded projects for production late in 2015. One of these is 'Drum', a multimedia poetry performance event on the theme of war, and the other is a new play set in the inner city called 'The Bedminster Bigfoot'.
- We continue to help service users across the country in setting up new theatre and arts projects and have most recently been involved in new initiatives with Arts Etcetera in Kidderminster and Coffee House Theatre in Plymouth.

2014 - 15 was our eighteenth year as a group and our eighth year of operation as a registered charity.

Work on our next large scale production, *The Square Wheel of Time* was well advanced by the end of the year.

Progress on The Aims and Objectives of Stepping Out Theatre 2014/15



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.
- 2) We mounted a large number of individual productions again 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, Bath and London, but also in places where we had not performed before such as New York.

- 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

As part of our preparations for the next three year programme of work, 2016 - 19, Stepping Out Theatre have just commissioned a new External Evaluation of the group from Prof. Steve Onyett of Exeter University who conducted our last evaluation. This new evaluation will be available to view online later in 2015.

In the meantime, the last Stepping Out Theatre external evaluation is still available online at our website along with all our Annual Reports and Accounts for the last 7 years. Our last evaluation was commissioned by NESTA and conducted over a two year period. 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 the Evaluation. Funders have been similarly impressed with the conclusions that Steve Onyett's research has come to.

Productions 2014/15

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 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.



Media Monsters

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. In '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



Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness

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.

Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness

Lucy has been afflicted by Meta Theatricus Type A, a strange new disorder where she believes she's a character in a play about her life. Help is on offer from two unlikely sources – a polar bear called Paul who says he's a psychiatric nurse, and a maverick psychiatrist called Wallace Real, who bears a striking resemblance to a stage magician.

Why is Lucy being played by four actors? Can Paul or Wallace really help her get better? Or are they both part of her losing the plot??

Join Lucy in the race to find out the truth about mental health services and the Whole Evil Plan as she chases the white rabbit of healing down a tunnel deep below the Houses of Parliament to ...

Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness!

This was the latest play written specifically for the group by Mark Breckon. After a four month rehearsal process involving about fifty service users, it was finally produced at the Rondo Theatre in Bath and the Brewery Theatre in Bristol in June 2014. This production set a new record for the largest cast for a Stepping Out Theatre production, with 34 people on stage and many others taking part in the process leading up to performances. It was the fourth full length play commissioned from Mark Breckon and was directed by Stepping Out founder member Cheryl Douglas. It received excellent audience feedback and reviews.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Stepping Out Theatre had been working for over two years on this hugely ambitious musical theatre adaptation of Thomas Hardy's classic novel, and it was finally produced for a four week run in September 2014 at the Wimbledon New Theatre in London, directed by Stepping Out Associate Director Chris Loveless. The show featured a cast of eleven performers onstage, most playing instruments as well as singing and dancing, and two offstage musicians. The production earned probably the best set of reviews and audience feedback ever received for a production by the company.

In An Hotel

This adaptation of a Chekhov short story was produced by Stepping Out group members in association with local theatre company 'Farce and Loose'. It was performed for one night only at the Wardrobe Theatre in Cotham and was enthusiastically received. Stepping Out are currently awaiting the results of an Arts Council funding application to develop this small project into a full evening of theatre drawn from Chekhov's short stories.



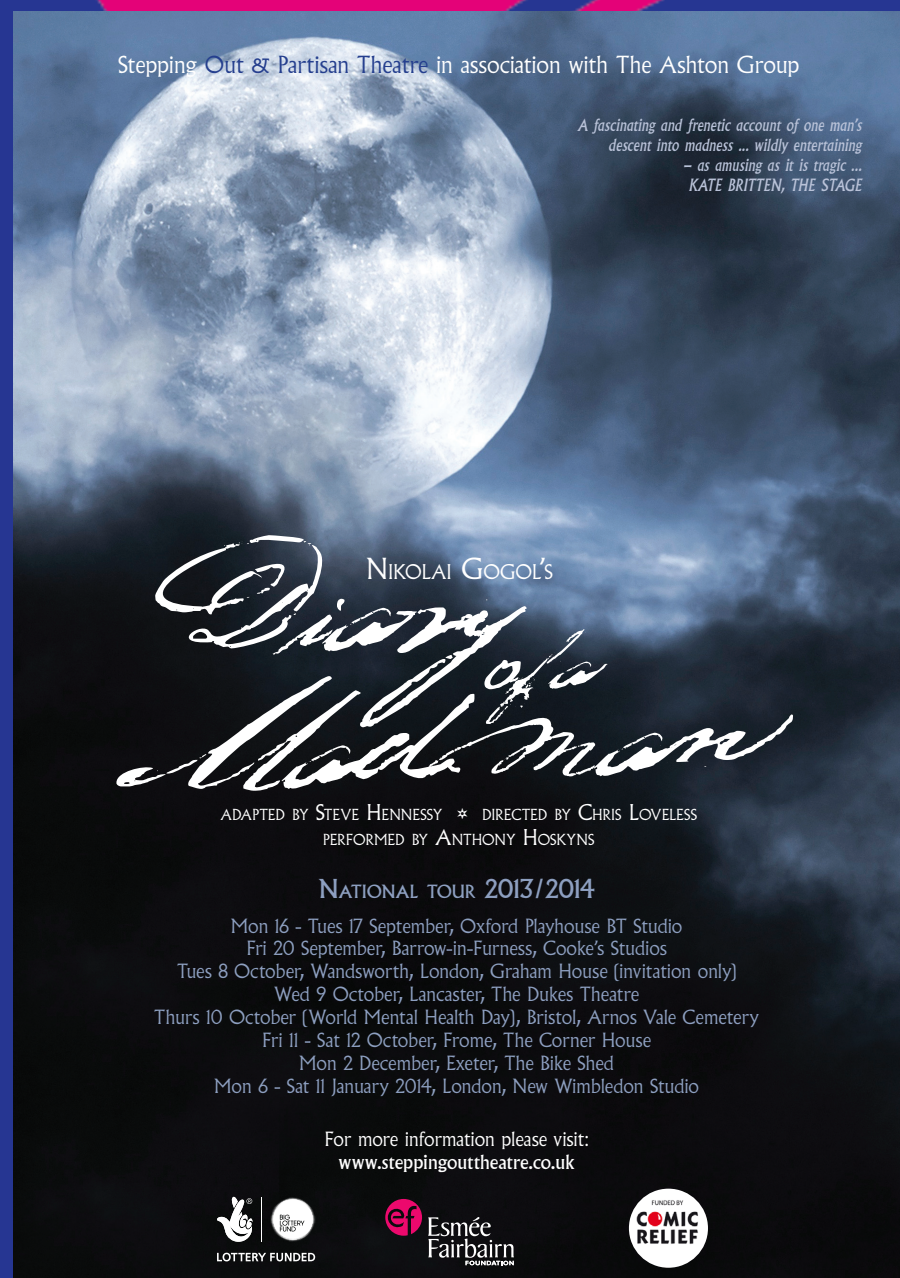
Tess of the D'Urbervilles

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. The tour reached a fantastic conclusion with a one off performance at the Century Association in New York in December 2014. This small and highly portable production is still taking bookings for 2015.



Spell Me Slowly

Regular Stepping Out playwright Mark Breckon has been working with Plymouth based writer Katherine Melmore for two years on a number of new writing projects, and this work resulted in a staged reading of Katherine's latest play 'Spell Me Slowly' at Mind Oasis in Plymouth in February 2015. Stepping Out is currently working with Katherine on developing her writing and towards a full production of this play in 2016.

Feedback from Audiences

Here is a selection of what audience members said about four of our productions in 2014 - 15. You can read all the feedback on our website.

WALLACE REAL'S MINISTRY OF MADNESS

Hilarious, honest and honourable. As an avid theatre lover, from the West End to Broadway, Stepping Out's production of the Ministry of Madness equally wowed me. Travelled from London to see it for my birthday weekend, and it was a TRUE TREAT! Thank you Stepping Out!

Really enjoyed it! I felt part of the madness / chaos throughout. Compelling performances all round, well done! The play took what can be a serious subject matter in a light, playful way, but more thought - provoking than I expected. So, again, very well done. Thank you!

Fantastic! High energy and entertaining. I loved the idea of multiple Lucies representing a subconscious at different stages of her life (and then came the superpower!). My favorite line - "Another version of reality that you can't be trained for." Brilliant!

Really enjoyed it! Great fun, good story and lots to think about. Loved the endless energy of the cast. All so engaged and engaging. Really liked the clever puns about health care, politics and theatre. Very well paced and well pitched.

Deep and clever script about the idea of theatre as therapy. Loved the Coalition government link. Acting was great - people really stayed in character even when they weren't in the spotlight. High energy, I was right in the story. Pertinent comment on the mental health system. Good to see the service users in the drama taking the power! Loved it. Thanks you.



I thoroughly enjoyed it. The characters portrayed by all of you were fantastic. Such energy in all of the performances and the entire production. Could really tell you were having an immense amount of fun.

I was very impressed, both with the acting and the brilliant script. It was interpreted with great enthusiasm and intelligence. Thank you for a fantastic evening.

We were very impressed with the performance. It was very zany, and the enthusiasm was overwhelming. Many thanks and compliments.

Hi, I really enjoyed the play, thanks for a really entertaining night and bringing out many issues of the mental health system. Fantastic.

Excellent - really good fun, but also a commentary on mental health services, illness etc - I really enjoyed it! Well done everyone and thanks for putting on such a great show. Very clever script / plot!

Great show and great fun. Lots of energy from the whole cast.

Brilliant show. Fast paced, fizzing with ideas, hilarious, surreal, bursting with insights into people and institutions, and some of my favourite songs and dance moves! And also deeply moving. One of my favourite Stepping Out experiences ever.

That was amazing, thank you so much. Thought it was extremely well written and radical, really cutting edge and poignant. I help run gardening geared towards health and a group member of yours is involved ... Bless and thanks for putting together a great show. Truly inspired at your courage ... I hope I can face some of my own life with the same humour and courage. Love, A x

Brilliant! Well rehearsed, professional, witty, great references to previous shows which makes me feel like one of the in – crowd! Loved it – especially the dancers, Arabic and other!

Entertaining, energetic zany fun! Love the costumes and storyline and I always wonder before the play how you will fit in belly dancing and Paul the Polar Bear and I'm never disappointed!

So cool guys! I was laughing all the way through. Didn't want it to end! ; -) x

I really loved it. Good story, good pace, good music, great magic. Thanks.

Great energy – really fun! Especially liked the Ladyboys!

Brilliant, funny and great satire.



Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness

Fabulous, inventive, topical, insightful and wonderfully entertaining as well. Congratulations on a very polished and seamless production.

Really enjoyed the magician character, awkwardness was very natural and funny.

Excellent play. Obviously lot of work in it. Enjoyed the evening and cast's enthusiasm.

A fantastic production, great to see so many people develop and reach new levels of confidence and skill, particularly Charlie, Emma and Simon. I have known some of these people for years and they so come alive in the show. Great script, well paced and high energy. Well done Stepping Out, I love you. P.s. Nick Allcock is an inspiration to me. I want to be him!

Very entertaining and very thought provoking. Could have gone further with the ideas of government and mental health services as well as masculinity, but that might not have made for such an entertaining night. Keep up the good work! X

Great to see all the familiar faces and enjoyed the character cohesion with the return of Paul the Polar Bear.

Great to watch and clearly must have been good fun to perform in. Loved lots of dramatic devices – the 5 Lucies for example – really successful. Also loved the parody of the men's group. Fantastic acting from all. Rellay enjoyed the Professor – a fascinating performance to watch. Made me want to take up belly dancing too!

Highly enjoyable – some hilarious moments and some very good acting. I enjoyed the belly dancing and the competitive macho males!

Excellent entertainment. Don't understand all of it, but perhaps I'm not supposed to. Well done all.

Yet again another brilliant show. Numerous wonderful and illuminating elements. I'm a mental health worker and I saw the last show at the QEH (some time ago) and kept searching for 'belly dancing theatre' but couldn't remember the name of the company. MORE SHOWS MORE OFTEN PLEASE!

Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness was a fun, entertaining performance. We were especially impressed by Simon Hawking's acting and magic tricks! Would recommend it to ANYONE! We will be sure to come back next year.

Absolutely fantastic evening. Thoroughly enjoyed. The actors' hard work was evident throughout the performance. Well done everyone!

This work is invaluable and really helps to challenge all the limiting, destructive notions of "the treatment of mental ill health". It was an inspiration!

Amazing show guys, we loved every minute of it! My face hurts from laughing so much.

Very much enjoyed the evening. Very good message and story. I really had a good evening. Well done to all the cast.

Really enjoyed! Leader of Man Zone brilliant! Loved the music – great choice! Plenty of action, great script. Excellent production of escape from train – very dramatic. Have seen about ten productions and this has been my favourite.

DIARY OF A MADMAN

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.



Diary of a Madman

Girl Talk



GIRL TALK

Fantastically rich characters and scripts. Superbly acted and directed.

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

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 as 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.

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



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. Well done Crysse!"

Great to see the plays last night. We thoroughly enjoyed it.

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. This is top rate drama but PLEASE review the level of caricature in Glen, the talk show host. She is an excellent actor, capable of nuanced performance – as shown in the second play – but the overreaching in the first play is troublesome. She wouldn't have got a position as talk show host – you need something more charismatic, not so tight and tense. Think Kilroy – Silk, rotten yes, but plausible.

Really rich and well performed

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!

Enjoyed both. Second play used time very effectively to reflect changing attitudes and to shift sympathies between characters

Very good – meaty and complex material, excellent performances

Great really enjoyed it. Very thought provoking

Very thought-provoking, well acted and very professional

FANTASTIC. Brill. Very amusing and lots of kissing. Shocking!

Amazing! Both wonderful plays and wonderful acting. Thank you for a great evening! XXx

Excellent, totally engaging

Really good! Very thought-provoking

Challenging, compelling & evocative. Real drama that pursues real issues in life & society rather than 'run of the mill' dross that the TV media return to relentlessly in the name of 'entertainment'

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

An excellent production of a very good show. It was performed well on all counts: singing, acting, dancing, musically and production values. The story was told clearly and faithful to Hardy's original. The three leads were excellent and Tess was particularly sympathetically portrayed. The ensemble acting, singing and instrument playing cast, were also very talented and added greatly to the atmosphere of the piece. ***** 5 STARS

This is a charming production. A talented young cast tell the moving story of T O T D. Lovely voices and v good musical ability. I'm usually not a big fan of musicals but I loved this one. The theatre is small and intimate and I felt very involved. This play deserves to be seen and I do hope people book this one. You won't be disappointed. ***** 5 STARS.

Stunning performance. We both really enjoyed it. ***** 5 STARS

Wonderful show.Fantastic musical telling of this classic tale .Beautiful music accompanied by very talented musicians.The acting and singing was first class.I really hope that this show does really well it certainly deserves it and i feel privileged to have seen its premier. A wonderful and memorable night of musical theatre. ***** 5 STARS

The cast were all very talented as actors/actresses and also as musicians. More than half of the cast were musicians as well covering a range of instruments, and were also supported by a small group of off stage musicians. Difficult to single out any specific performances but Jessica Daley was excellent with an exceptionally strong voice. A very enjoyable evening and a faithful reproduction of the story. **** 4 STARS

An enjoyable production, acted, sang and choreographed well, within the physical constraints of the venue. Before the show the producer told us of technical issued that may affect the show , but I was not aware of these, and everything seemed to run smoothly. An enjoyable evening out **** 4 STARS



Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Very touching production. The music was beautiful and the actor-muso ensemble was a very pleasant surprise. Clearly a very musical cast - the voices and harmonies were flawless. The small space was used very well. **** 4 STARS

Original piece of work demonstrating wonderful music and good choreography . The production was so professionally executed, it captures your full attention and I was sorry when it ended. The quality of the cast and their musicality impressed so much, a really memorable night. **** 4 STARS

Brilliant! Fantastic staging, choreography, singing coupled with some really top notch songs. I defy you not to hear the lyrics to "I deal in ideals" and not feel it resonate. ***** 5 STARS

A fantastic, musical interpretation of the story. The staging was inventive and a good use of the limited space. The variety of instruments played on stage was impressive and the performances were very strong. I thoroughly enjoyed it! **** 4 STARS

Superb talented cast in an innovative musical. Acting, playing musical instruments and singing, all at the same time, yet it did not detract from the moving storyline. A streamlined production in which all the actors worked effortlessly and harmoniously together as a team with no weak link. I do hope that it will go to the West End, reaching a wider audience in a larger venue. ***** 5 STARS

Why isn't this on in the West End? It should be! Think 'Once'. Think 'Les Miserables' then you have an idea how good this show is. Not only can the talented actors sing & dance, but they do it whilst playing musical instruments. They nimbly skipped around the small stage at Wimbledon Studio theatre whilst brandishing flutes, fiddles & oboes, not to mention the ukuleles ,mandolins guitars & drum. The musical score was excellent, the set imaginative & worked particularly well at the end when it depicted Stonehenge. Knowing the storyline, I wasn't expecting such an uplifting experience. This show deserves the full scope of lighting etc that a large theatre would give it. **** 4 STARS

I couldn't imagine a better way of having filled this gap in my knowledge of classic literature. ***** 5 STARS

Great show !!! See it !!! Multi-talented cast, who really do give it all they've got. And yes, it ought to transfer. Preferably to a small venue though, where the intimacy can be preserved. ***** 5 STARS

Very good singing, acting, dancing. Wonderful cast who plays different music instrument. Thy are just brilliant. Move this show to the WEST END PLS. ***** 5 STARS

What a great show. Thoroughly enjoyable from beginning to end. All performers are incredibly talented. They can sing, they can act and play multiple musical instruments. Go and see it, you won't be disappointed! ***** 5 STARS

I rarely write reviews, not because I can't be bothered or I don't have the time, but because I'm not sure I'll be sufficiently eloquent to describe them. I'm really not sure I have the right words now, but I had to write something because this performance was simply brilliant. The quality of the cast, the music; everything was done to such a high standard. The majority of the actors are multi-instrumentalists and play wonderfully. The tension they created was terrific and all done in such a small space. I've been lucky enough to see other things in the West End over the last couple of weeks and I have to say that however good they were, this was better. ***** 5 STARS

There has seemed to have been a lack of originality about musicals of late - too many revivals and pieces made from films. A Thomas Hardy story to a musical - how could this work? I was surprised how well - good score and brilliantly performed - dynamic, inspirational - need I say more? I would urge someone to offer a larger venue to this exceptional piece. ***** 5 STARS

This is a great show. Not a single moment wasted, one stage set , a varied score , fantastic lighting, talented well cast actors/singers/ musicians (most were doing all three) were thoroughly engaging .The stage was small- yet never felt crowded, it managed to convey both the space of the countryside and equally claustrophobia when emotions were becoming menacing. Very faithful to the story. This deserves to do very well. ***** 5 STARS

An absolutely stunning show and hard to believe it is not on in the West End where it deserves to be shown. Alex Loveless is a first class composer whose works were delivered beautifully by a hugely talented cast of singers and musicians. I would gladly see it again and urge AC members not to miss this show while you have the chance! ***** 5 STARS

very engaging story that touched my emotions and made me want to put right the evil done to Tess on her life journey. strong vocal and acting performances from both the leads and the ensemble who were all very talented actor-musicians. **** 4 STARS

I didn't know there was a small theatre studio over Wimbledon Theatre! It sits about 70 I'd guess. It certainly housed a fabulous show, intimate and very enjoyable. I took a friend who thoroughly enjoyed the musical - even though she didn't know the story at all. I both knew the story from reading it and the recentish TV adaptation. The musical was a very good interpretation if a tad long. The cast were excellent, especially Tess. Bravo Wimbledon Studio - may this go on to larger venues for more to see! ***** 5 STARS

The musical was wonderful. I would recommend it to everyone who loves musicals. The musicians were amazing. All actors had wonderful voices. Some songs were really catchy, although there were a couple of parts which needed improving, overall the musical was amazing. It would be much better if the production was transferred to a bigger venue, as this studio was too little for such production. ***** 5 STARS

Well worth seeing and had everything going for it; good storyline, excellent acting, singing and dancing. I'd like to see it on stage in the West End. ***** 5 STARS

Hadn't realised this was in the Studio - which we'd never been to before - and was wondering what we were going to get. What we got was a little gem! It took us a short while to get into it, but soon we were smitten with the wonderful music, singing and the really clever and imaginative adaptation of Thomas Hardy's classic, in such a tiny area too. A very talented group of actors/musicians made this a rather special evening. ***** 5 STARS

A really good show! It took a little while for the cast to yield in Saturdays performance but when they did it was great. They could all sing really well- which is not always the case in musicals. Even more impressive was the fact that many of the cast were also qualified musicians and played several instrument throughout. I really loved that! The story was well adapted- the venue great though I think the show could do well in a bigger venue as well. My only dislike was the use of the smoke machine which I could not understand the necessity of. And it made me cough a lot. Sorry! **** 4 STARS

Powerful intense and very moving I hope this moves to a bigger theatre really creative intrepration of a novel that I had thought would have been difficult to bring to the stage. ***** 5 STARS

Original piece of work demonstrating wonderful music and good choreography . The production was so professionally executed, it captures your full attention and I was sorry when it ended. The quality of the cast and their musicality impressed so much, a really memorable night. ***** 5 STARS

Fantastic new production, wonderful music and beautifully staged. A real gem, surely destined for the West End! ***** 5 STARS

Very, very good show. The Studio is a great small space but this production would readily transfer to a larger venue. The performances and music were excellent - don't miss it. ***** 5 STARS

A faithful adaptation of Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles with an exciting musical score. A talented cast giving a delightful performance. A must see. **** 4 STARS

Very well worked Musical with a very talented cast. I enjoyed the show from start to finish. This was well written and directed. It works well in the Wimbledon Studio but hope at some point it makes a larger production. ***** 5 STARS

My only and big complaint is that this show isn't on a west end show where it deserves to be. Everything about this production including music, lyrics, acting, was amazing. If you haven't booked yet then do as the talent bringing this epic story alive is superb. I hope it goes on to bigger and better things! ***** 5 STARS

Brilliant! A great evening's entertainment! The music, dancing and singing was most enjoyable and the play reflected the feelings conjured up by Thomas Hardy in the novel but it was a lot less miserable! I didn't want to miss a minute of it! I hope it's a big West End Hit. ***** 5 STARS

Excellent show. The music was beautiful and the voices and harmonies were flawless. The cast were very talented with a variety of instrumentalists. Good choreography. I really enjoyed it. ***** 5 STARS

Feedback from Performers

A selection from some of the comments by service users who took part in our productions in 2014 – 15 about what they got from their involvement with Stepping Out Theatre

I found it very moving the way that the group rallied round the two group members who were ill during the production and the two who had birthdays, sending messages, organizing cakes, cards, parties and hospital visits. I also found it moving the way that the group made a fuss of anyone who was struggling and took special care and notice of them. I found it moving that people worked so hard and gave so much of themselves to make the show so good.

I think the support I had from the group was very moving. I was touched by the way people understood what I was going through, and helped me through.

I loved the whole experience. The sense of community and the fun and enjoyment. I loved getting to know other people in the group better and building a supportive network together. I loved the sense of achievement from attempting something so ambitious and difficult and pulling it off. I think this project made a big difference in people's lives, including mine. I am so looking forward to the next one!

I found Simon's growing confidence and fluency with his lines very touching; it was great to see him develop so well. It was moving to hear him say his closing lines with such snappy vitality.

I found it moving someone deciding to take part in the show after several years of not being involved as she had lost her nerve. Then she actually asked to say a line – and that was a huge step. Also, it was moving seeing one of the professional actors patiently explain a better way of doing a complicated move to one of the young actors.

I was pleased with the way the Ian Wilmot bit went. I thought with both Steve and LiSah playing it, it was moving.

Seeing Simon Hawking blossom during the rehearsal and performance was moving. He really shone.

In my opinion the very touching "moment" is when all the cast get together at the very beginning and at the end (the dance) that is when it touches my heart. To see everyone making an effort to make sure the audience get a great show. At the end dance when we are all dancing it was a very touching moment to see all the cast have smiles on their faces to show they have worked hard and have put a lot of effort in.

The way everyone rallied round to help me on the night that I went on with the script and how pleased people seemed to be that I was there performing with them again.

It was touching to see Simon embrace his role as Wallace R and his happiness at dancing to Madness.

I valued the praise for my contribution to the show by many different audience members for each performance night. It gave me confidence and made me feel like I'm doing the right thing. I was very happy with the show and felt honoured to be part of it as well as feeling wanted, needed and welcomed.

I really liked the Arabian dancing – the rhythm & choreography. But I was also touched by the growth in confidence of several actors, especially Simon as Wallace Real.

I was stressed. So stressed I wanted to quit everything, but after the run I was given a thank you card and I felt really appreciated.

I loved the fun of being part of a group production. The need to commit to rehearsals and performances in spite of a full and busy life – knowing we need each other for the 'whole evil plan' to work. It was a real achievement remembering my lines and being part of a successful production. Having an appreciative audience was great.

I was stressed but I did get respect for my work on the make up and I got the chance to be more assertive. I also got to know more people this year – newcomers and existing members.

I got a lot of fun and a welcome distraction from a stressful situation I was going through

It was very beneficial to me – and to many people I feel – to work on my theatre skills in a context of clear leadership, excellent direction and with people with a similar motivation as mine, to grow in their role, to connect on and off stage, to have fun while being more skilful. It was great to be in such a fun, interesting show.

As always it was a pleasure to watch people blossom and to see friendships develop. The support shown by the group to those who struggle is heart-warming.

What I got from being in the production this year was just how much the members support you even during illness which spurs you on during performance and in general life.

I always get a lot out of being part of it and I like all the others, it is good to be part of a team and being involved in a group where we all do a great play for the audience. Well done Stepping Out!

I had a re-connection with Stepping Out Theatre. I was only in the last scene because of other commitments and it felt odd not to be so involved but I am glad to finally get to connect.

I think it was great doing two venues again, and I loved going back to the Rondo after so many years.

I honestly cannot think of what could have been done better – the rehearsal programme was great, clear and directive. The direction was given with elements of authority which did not suit everybody but at the end of the day the performance became slick to the audience.

I have been with the Stepping Out Theatre Company for 14 years and the funniest moment in the play was when the "ladyboys" came on stage and did their bit, the audience thought it was funny and I did too. A great piece of work by Stepping Out Theatre as usual.

Reviews

A selection from some of this year's reviews



Media Monsters

MEDIA MONSTERS

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**

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

'Awarding 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' five stars seems stingy, particularly when it's undoubtedly the best emerging new musical I've seen in years ... Whatever happens to this gorgeous musical we will certainly see it again – hopefully in the West End where it belongs.'

******* Five stars, Fiona Lister, Mellowdaylondon**

'An absolute joy to watch and more than worthy of a place on a larger stage or at the very least playing to larger audiences and, dare I say, it should be seen on a West End stage.'

******* Five stars, Caroline Hanks-Farmer, londontheatre1.com**

'A magnificent performance.'

****** Four stars, Chaneen Salako, the upcoming.co.uk**

'Something incredibly special. A heavyweight novel married to a heavyweight score, producing a show that's potentially powerful.'

****** Four stars, Ginger Hibiscus**

'This new musical by Alex Loveless – book, lyrics and music is sheer enchantment from start to finish'

****** Four stars, Aline Waites, Remotegoat**

'This beautiful new musical deserves a home on a bigger stage: it has a perfect blend of a new score, great book, talented cast and winning direction.' **Jemma Anderson, ayoungertheatre.com**

'I do hope that there is a great future life for this musical which deserves a bigger stage and to be seen by a wider audience.' **Amy Yorston, British Theatre Guide**

'Tess of the D'Urbervilles is a beautiful new musical that re-tells a substantial novel with an energising score. It deserves a longer run, a bigger budget and a wider audience. Go see this show.' **Jonathan Baz, jonathanbaz.com**

'This is a first rate affair worth seeking out without delay.' **William Russell, Reviewsgate**

'The fusion of the Victorian Novel and Musical Theatre - is remarkable. It may not quite be Les Mis, but it's not so very far away, and that's thrilling enough for me!' **Gary Naylor, Broadwayworld**

'There is nothing I could fault with this production and I therefore feel its only right to give it the five stars it deserves.' **Caroline Hanks-Farmer, londontheatre1.com**

'It's about time we introduced another great love story to the West End stage and this would provide a refreshing tonic to long-running musicals.' **Fiona Lister, Mellowdaylondon**

'Great to have original musicals by talented young writers ... Boasting a charming score, Tess of the D'Urbervilles is a welcome addition to the roster of new British book musicals.' **Patrick Honoré, musicaltheatrereview.com**

'A musically stunning production with haunting songs and strong direction.' **Amy Yorston, British Theatre Guide**

'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' is worthy of several awards.' **Fiona Lister, Mellowdaylondon**

'The musical score will leave you humming in the interval and at the close when you leave the Wessex countryside of the New Wimbledon Studio with memories of a glorious afternoon.' **Elaine Pinkus, uktheatre.net**

'This is the best new musical to hit the Off-West End stage in years' **Fiona Lister, Mellowdaylondon**

'Alex Loveless' surging power ballads', **Mark Shenton, The Stage** 'Congratulations to Alex Loveless (book, music and lyrics) for 'The melodies and powerful lyrics are blended with operatic folk music – a completely unexpected, unusual mix but the result hits you right from the start.' **Fiona Lister, Mellowdaylondon**



Tess of the D'Urbervilles

'A feast of melody and fine performances - Loveless has come up with some enchanting ballads and several rousing chorus numbers for the Wessex peasantry.' **William Russell, Reviewsgate**

'This is a musical that tugs the heartstrings and won't let go. It's divine work.' **Fiona Lister, Mellowdaylondon**

'The show's tragic ending is a masterpiece, not only of musical intensity but also of outstanding stagecraft from both the company and Chris Loveless' top-notch team of creatives.' **Jonathan Baz, jonathanbaz.com**

'There is great depth to this production with lyrics that are poetic and yet not overly melodramatic. The small cast interact brilliantly and, although the stage is full, excellent direction from Chris Loveless ensures that it is never crowded.' **Amy Yorston, British Theatre Guide**

'Alex Loveless has excelled at lush harmonies that are thrillingly and passionately sung by the whole company, a particular highlight being the opening number Children of the Earth.' **Jonathan Baz, jonathanbaz.com**

'The show reaches it's climax with a phenomenal ensemble performance. Clearly practiced to perfection, it's a special moment that triggers a whole cascade of emotions, tumbling over one another like rocks in an avalanche, gaining momentum.' **Ginger Hibiscus**

'Emotions were high ... sorrowful sobbing could be heard from the audience.' **Chaneen Salako, the upcoming.co.uk**



'The original story is such a fraught, dramatic one, I was worried that Hardy's story might be diluted. I needn't have.' **Jemma Anderson, ayoungertheatre.com**

'a dramatic triumph. The whole cast support and complement each other bringing their individual talents to create the perfect ensemble.' **Caroline Hanks-Farmer, londontheatre1.com**

'It worked on every level ... an exciting and accessible production which can be enjoyed by those who know the novel and those who are new to it.' **Elaine Pinkus, uktheatre.net**

'The three leads provide a compelling centre to the show - a strong trio of performances' **Mark Shenton, The Stage**

'However, Jess Daley in the titular role really steals the show. She's astonishing at being the heartbroken heroine, balancing out devastating misery with a wonderful sense of romantic hope and feminine tenacity. You really feel the inner pain and turmoil that is written clear across her face' **James Waygood, Grumpy Gay Critic**

'If you are looking for depth, fantastic acting, great movement, sublime singing and music then this is the show for you.' **Caroline Hanks-Farmer, londontheatre1.com**

'Daley doesn't simply play Tess as a victim, she finds a great depth and roundness in the role. Her performance packs great emotional punch' **Ed Theakston, Pocket Size Theatre**

Poetry Work at The Square Club Cafe and Elsewhere

Over recent years, our work at Fromeside Medium Secure Hospital has focused on producing poetry anthologies by current and past Fromeside service users. We have produced two anthologies with L.S. Kimberley and one with Thomas Glover. 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 published his second anthology 'Picasso the Surrealist and Other Poems' with another launch at the Bristol Old Vic, supported again by local writers, along with a second anthology by Kehinde Obileye, a group member whose first anthology we also helped to publish earlier.

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

"Poems with punch and verve that linger behind the eyes for hours."
Luke Wright, award-winning performance poet and broadcaster

"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

"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 Trustee Charles Thompson. Several members have performed at this regular event.

We are currently working with Anna Saunders who is Director of the Cheltenham Poetry Festival and Stepping Out Trustee Charles Thompson who runs poetry events at the Square Club and the Landsdowne in Bristol to develop more opportunities for poetry with our group members. Anna has edited an anthology of poetry by group member Charlie Ekpalo who has performed at the Cheltenham Festival as part of her work with Anna.

Emma Staddon is currently working with local writer Crysse Morrison who is editing Emma's first anthology.

It is hoped to publish four new anthologies by poets L. S. Kimberley, Thomas Glover, Charlie Ekpalo and Emma Staddon at a major poetry event in late 2015.

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.

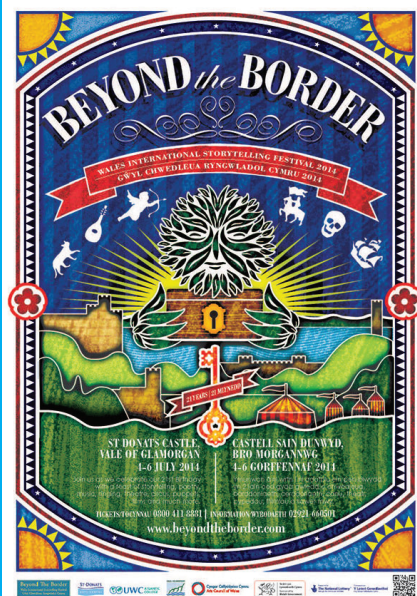


The Gill Amphlett Social Fund

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 St. Donat's near Cardiff to see the fabulous International Storytelling Festival, 'Beyond the Border'. Twenty group members camped out for three nights near the beautiful grounds of Atlantic College. Our Annual Xmas get together was entertained this year by a special cabaret devised and directed with members by Associate Director Marc Geoffrey



We ran our usual series of trips to all the productions in the 2014 Theatre West season, including a trip to a magical outdoor piece of theatre in Leigh Woods and a minibus trip to Exeter as well as other productions like Philip Ridley's incredible 'Dark Vanilla Jungle' at the Brewery. A large coach party of members also went down to London to see the group's production of 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles'.

Other creative social activities included four joint events with Mind Your Music where members of both groups performed. Two of these were held at the Square Club, one at the Southbank Centre and one at the Colston Hall.

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 Wilmo' 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.

In collaboration with Chrysalis Theatre, Stepping Out went on to 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 last two years, Playback Theatre has formed the focus of the feedback evenings when members meet to talk about, share and write about their experience of being in the large scale productions 'Hermione Steel and the Island of Lost Minds' and 'Wallace Real's Ministry of Madness'.



Drama and Devising for Performance Group

The fund which enables us to offer For the first time in 2013 – 14, we ran a 'Drama and Devising for Performance' group, run by Stepping Out Associate Director Marc Geoffrey and Stepping Out Co – chair Kirsty Cox. It replaced the Dramatherapy group that had run for the previous two years. The group was such a success that it met again throughout the autumn and winter of 2014 – 15. The group has been meeting every Monday evening during the period between the end of our large scale production and before the next one starts. In 2014 – 15, the group devised and performed two pieces of drama in front of the Stepping Out membership. This popular and successful new group is scheduled to run again in 2015 – 16 after work on 'The Square Wheel of Time', the next large scale production has finished.

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 has been repeated every year since and was run for the fourth time in November 2014 with our walk ending up at the Brewery Theatre.

The Big Give Xmas Challenge 2014 raised a record – breaking amount of money for the group, and was actually our single largest item of income for the second year running. 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 – 15 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/steppingout.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 time and this has resulted in contacted by many more people are interested in joining the company by writers whose work deals

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;

CHRYSLIS 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 fifteen co-productions with Chrysalis Theatre, and there are plans for others. Chrysalis Theatre is currently in receipt of an Awards for All grant towards two co-productions with Stepping Out Theatre in 2015 / 16.

MIND YOUR MUSIC

Eleven 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 Fromside 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.



A Mind Your Music gig

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

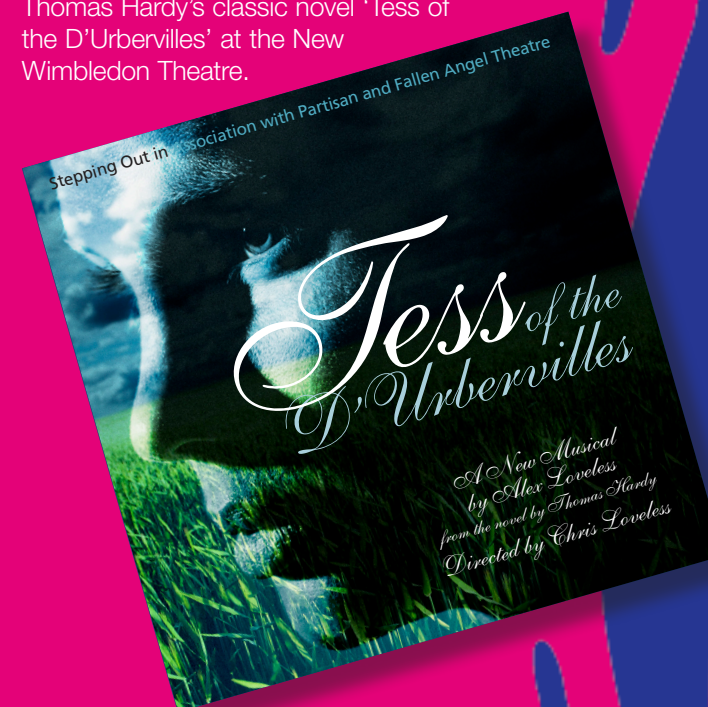
We helped former Stepping Out Treasurer Hazel Stewart to set up this Frome - based group which runs a number of different creative projects with people in recovery from illness and traumatic experiences. Dreamweavers has been a regular co-producer on many Stepping Out Theatre productions, and has also been particularly involved in collaborating with Stepping Out on the work at Fromside Medium Secure Hospital. They were the main producer for 'Media Monsters' in early 2014 and are co-producing both 'The Square Wheel of Time' and 'The Bedminster Bigfoot' in 2015 / 16.



Mask workshop

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 co-produced 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. In February 2015 Healing Arts and Stepping Out jointly ran a mask workshop with spectacular masks made by service users.

COFFEE HOUSE THEATRE

Stepping Out Theatre has been working with Plymouth based playwright Katherine Melmore for the last two years and we are currently supporting Katherine in setting up her own mental health theatre company based in Plymouth. Katherine's first play received a staged reading at Plymouth Mind in February 2015 and we are working with her towards a full production of this play with her own company.

ARTS ETCETERA

Arts ETC ('Empowerment Through Creativity'), are a new community theatre and arts 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, an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's 'The Happy Prince' was a sellout success at the Kidderminster Arts Festival in 2014 with input from Stepping Out Theatre.

Financial Report and Accounts 2014 – 15

In the financial year 2014 / 15, the group received a total of £208,643 in income, and spent a total of £194,975. One of our most ambitious and expensive productions ever, the musical theatre adaptation of 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles,' pushed up our income and expenditure to produce our highest ever turnover as a group.

This was the second year of three year grants 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.

2014 / 15 was the first year of a new two year Comic Relief grant which means that thanks to them, for the fourth year running, we were able to do a huge amount of extra work with service users in individual productions.

An important new stream of income over the last four years has been the Big Give Xmas Challenge. For the last two years, money raised through The Big Give has been our single biggest source of income.

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

In 2013 – 14, our unrestricted reserves at the end of the year stood at £17,674. In 2014 – 15, these were slightly down at £13,059. 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. At the end of 2014 – 15, the group carried across two large amounts in restricted funds. £13.5k was an Arts Council grant towards a production in 2015 – 16 and £13.84k was Big Lottery Funding for salaries.

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.

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 Company Accounts 1st March 2014 - 28th February 2015

Payroll Section A - Receipts	Restricted	Unrestricted	2014-2015	2013- 2014
Big Lottery Fund Grant (1)	50,001.00		50,001.00	40000.00
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (2)	20,000.00		20,000.00	25000.00
Arts Council Grant for the Arts (3)	19,900.00		19,900.00	9000.00
Comic Relief (via Quartet Foundation) (4)	15,000.00		15,000.00	15000.00
Mind Your Music Projects Manager Salary (5)	13,471.40		13,471.40	12198.90
Big Give Xmas Challenge and other Donations (6)		77,451.80	77,451.80	58848.00
Box Office Receipts		945.80	945.80	151.88
Payments for Performances (7)		451.00	451.00	1300.00
Interest and Refunds		1,121.81	1,121.81	677.00
Santander Foundation		5,000.00	5,000.00	0.00
Co Producer Contributions(8)		5,000.00	5,000.00	0.00
Members' Donations		300.00	300.00	0.00
TOTAL	118,372.40	90,270.41	208,642.81	162,175.78

Section B - Payments	Restricted	Unrestricted	2014-2015	2013- 2014
Payroll	47,430.88	0.00	47,430.88	46,020.57
Rent (incl Theatre Hire)	3,383.00	7,345.42	7,345.42	5,165.13
General Running Expenses	2,200.50	8,069.34	10,269.84	7,934.44
Miscellaneous Production Costs	15,000.00	2,370.82	17,370.82	19,021.15
Training	0.00	4,298.00	4,298.00	1,026.65
Travel for Staff and Volunteers	0.00	10,342.88	10,342.88	9,488.33
Subsistence	0.00	5,783.83	5,783.83	6,053.43
Promotional Materials	0.00	1,334.20	1,334.20	1,981.30
Theatre Trips	0.00	2,904.39	2,904.39	2,208.25
Charitable Donations	0.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	1,800.00
Workshop Leader Fees	0.00	3,196.50	3,196.50	3,906.00
Freelance Workers and Artists	35,400.00	45,038.33	80,438.33	44,513.06
Net Fixed Assets	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL	100,031.38	94,943.65	194,975.03	148,471.21

Section C - Balance Sheet	Restricted	Unrestricted	2014-2015	2013- 2014
Bank Balance at Start of Year	9,000.00	17,673.83	26,673.83	12,969.26
Bank Receipts	118,372.40	90,270.41	208,642.81	162,175.78
Bank Payments	-100,031.38	-94,943.65	-194,975.03	-148,471.21
Bank Balance at End of Year	100,031.38	94,943.65	194,975.03	148,471.21
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	27,341.02	13,478.27	40,819.29	27,151.51

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 general running 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 grants for production of 'Drum' in 2015 and writing of 'Lipstick For Dionysus'. £13.5 carried over for 'Drum'.
- 4) Funds received from Comic Relief via the Quartet Foundation 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 2014 - 15
- 5) Restricted Fund income from Mind Your Music for payroll services to MYM 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 2014 - 15.
- 7) Payment to group for performing at mental health conference in London.
- 8) Payment from In Extremis Theatre towards production costs of 'The Square Wheel of Time'.

Section E - Approvals

Kirsty Cox (Co - Chair)
28th April 2014

Beverley Jackson (Independent Examiner)
28th April 2014



