

ADVANCE

Driving change within England's leading performing arts companies

Tonic recognises the power of bringing cohorts of organisations together to work alongside each other on shared challenges and to ensure cross-fertilisation of ideas and practice.

In 2014 and 2016 we delivered *Advance*, our ground-breaking programme focusing on improving the situation for women in the performing arts. The programme brought together the Artistic Directors, Chief Executives, and senior staff of leading performing arts organisations. They recognised that something was preventing talented women in the performing arts industries from rising to the top and wanted to understand in a nuanced and complex way why this was the case and then lead the way in addressing it.

This document is an archive of the Advance website which was available online between 2014 and 2022 at www.tonictheatre-advance.co.uk. As each page varies in length, you might find it easiest to page through the document using the next and previous page buttons.

Find out more about the Advance programme and what happened next at tonictheatre.co.uk/advance/





The Royal Shakespeare Company. Photo: Peter Cook.

[Participating organisations](#) | [Why we did it](#) | [Find out more](#)

Advance is a six-month programme designed and led by Tonic Theatre. Bringing together cohorts of leading performing arts organisations, we support them to understand the root causes behind gender imbalances within their own companies and art forms, and provide them with the tools by which they can achieve meaningful change. To date, 20 organisations have participated in Advance.

2016

Dance, Opera, Theatre

CAST

CLEAN BREAK

M / MAHOGANY
OPERA GROUP

NATIONAL
Theatre

NEW
WOLSEY
THEATRE

Northern
Ballet

N
NORTHERN
STAGE

ROYAL
OPERA
HOUSE

S A D L
E R S W
E L L S

2014

Pilot – Theatre

ALMEIDA
THEATRE

CHICHESTER
FESTIVAL
THEATRE

ETT
ENGLISH
TOURING
THEATRE

G A T E
Gate
Theatre
Notting
Hill

Headlong

PENTABUS
RURAL THEATRE COMPANY

RSC
ROYAL
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

sheffield theatres
crucible lyceum studio

tricycle
THEATRE

WYPLAY
HOUSE

Young
Vic
It's a
big world
in here

Why?

Advance was created in response to increasingly loud questioning from within the performing arts industries as to why, despite previous gains and recent signs of progress, when it comes to female talent being visible on the most prestigious and best resourced stages in the country, there is still far to go.

Advance seeks to catalyse concentrated change within a cohort of highly influential companies, thereby paving the way for broader, sector-wide progress.

**BUT SURELY
IT'S GOT TO COME
DOWN TO THE BEST
PERSON FOR
THE JOB?**

Advance isn't about curtailing creative freedom, nor is it about forcing performing arts companies' to employ less talented individuals. What it is about is making sure that when opportunities arise, it really is the most talented people who get them, regardless of gender.

[+ More](#)

**ARE WE
STILL TALKING
ABOUT THIS?**

Yes we are. Despite a recent burst of progress, there's still a long way to go, and the presence of a small number of talented women at the top doesn't mean we're equal. But Advance isn't just talking about talking; it's about actively seeking to understand where inequalities exist, and then acting to address them.

[+ More](#)

**IS THIS ANOTHER
WELL-INTENTIONED
BUT ULTIMATELY
INEFFECTUAL
SCHEME?**

We don't think so. What makes Advance different is that it is led by the companies themselves, it arises from a need that they have identified, and is designed to equip them with a sophisticated understanding of how to address inequalities at the root, rather than advocating short-term 'sticking plaster' solutions. This isn't about surface change; it's about going to the heart of these organisations' working processes.

[+ More](#)



Something is preventing talented women in the performing arts from rising to the top. We wanted to understand why and do something to address it.

Lydia Wilson and Oliver Chris in King Charles III, Almeida Theatre. Photo: Johan Persson.

WHAT IS ADVANCE?

ABOUT TONIC THEATRE

Tonic supports the arts and creative industries to achieve greater gender equality in their work and workforces. We design, create, and deliver tools that ensure a greater level of female talent is able to rise to the top.

You can read more about what we do at
+ www.tonictheatre.co.uk

Tonic's Advance programme brings together the Artistic Directors, Chief Executives, and senior staff of leading performing arts organisations. To date, we have worked across dance, opera, and theatre with: Almeida, Cast, Chichester Festival Theatre, Clean Break, English Touring Theatre, the Gate, Headlong, Mahogany Opera Group, National Theatre, New Wolsey Theatre, Northern Ballet, Northern Stage, Pentabus, Royal Opera House, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Sadler's Wells, Sheffield Theatres, Tricycle Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, and the Young Vic.

These organisations recognised that something was preventing talented women in the performing arts industries from rising to the top. They wanted to understand in a nuanced and complex way why this was the case and then lead the way in addressing it.

From October 2013 to May 2014 Tonic piloted the Advance process with a cohort of 11 theatres, guiding them through a six-month period of research, reflection and activity which tasked them to take an interrogative and methodical approach to understanding the root causes behind the comparative lack of women in key creative roles. Rather than settling for quick fixes or advocating a 'sticking plaster' approach, Advance tasked the theatres to understand not only where barriers to female talent exist within their organisations but why.

The second cycle of the programme began in January 2016 and saw two key expansions. First the programme opened out to encompass dance and opera organisations alongside theatre companies. Secondly, the focus of what the participants explored broadened beyond women in creative roles alone; while some organisations chose to remain focused on creative roles such as choreography and conducting, others explored areas such as artist development, pathways to senior leadership, and how the culture of communication within an organisation impacts on gender balance.

Upon concluding the programme all participating organisations are required to have in place concrete and considered plans for how they will create change. This entails them working towards progress within their own organisations but also considering how, within their cohort and with Tonic's ongoing collaboration, they can drive for industry-wide change.

This website shares what the organisations have done, what they learned and what, as a consequence, they are doing differently. It is a snapshot of the work that was done, and gives an insight into Advance's process. We hope it will inspire future action towards achieving gender equality both onstage and off.

The 2014 Advance pilot was supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the 2016 programme by Arts Council England through Grants for the arts. Tonic's academic partner on Advance is Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. You can read more about their role in the programme here.

- + [About the process](#)
- + [Advance 2014-2020 impact – report](#) PDF 721KB
- + [Advance 2016 programme](#)
- + [Advance 2014 pilot programme](#)

ADVANCE

The aspiration for gender equality - not just desirable, entirely possible.

Advance works with England's leading performing arts companies, transforming their aspiration for gender equality into reality. Led by Tonic Theatre, we are removing barriers to female talent both on-stage and off.

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ACADEMIC PARTNER



2016 PROGRAMME FUNDED BY



2014 PROGRAMME FUNDED BY



Tonic supports the arts and creative industries to achieve greater gender equality in their work and workforces.

House by Somalia Seaton (2016). Photo: Jane Hobson

ABOUT TONIC THEATRE

Tonic designs, creates, and delivers tools that support the arts and creative industries to achieve greater gender equality in their work and workforces.

We were established in 2011 to catalyse a culture shift in how the UK theatre industry thought about and responded to the challenges of persistent gender imbalances. While today much of our work remains rooted in theatre, demand for our unique and effective approach has seen us expand into other areas of the arts and creative industries. The insights we've gained in gender equality also support us to undertake additional work on the subjects of representation, access, and diversity.

Tonic's approach involves getting to grips with the principles that lie beneath how our industry functions – our working methods, decision-making processes, and organisational structures – and identifying how, in their current form, these can create barriers. Once we have done that, we devise practical yet imaginative alternative approaches and work with our partners to trial and deliver them. Essentially, our goal is to equip our colleagues in the arts and creative industries with the tools they need to ensure a greater level of female talent is able to rise to the top.

+ www.tonictheatre.co.uk

ON THE SUBJECT OF CHANGE

Advance has been co-led by the Director of Tonic, Lucy Kerbel and Tonic Advance Associate Vicky Long, a freelance consultant and producer. Here Vicky and Lucy comment on their personal connection to the subject of change.



Lucy Kerbel

Before I set up Tonic, I worked as a theatre director and I suppose change was at the centre of what I was doing. When you're a director you spend all day in the rehearsal room with actors thinking about change. Change is inherently dramatic and most drama is about a character trying to turn something around, and winning or losing at that, or about characters experiencing some kind of change. If you get to the end of a play and nothing has changed it's probably been a pretty dull experience.

So through this dramatic engagement, I became very interested in how you get people outside of the theatre to change, change how they think, how they act – what's needed to be successful in that? And it's that fascination which has fueled my work with Tonic.



Vicky Long

In the past, I've worked with numerous organisations and artists to address climate change and was Project Director at Cape Farewell for a time. Cape Farewell takes artists on a physical journey (often to the Arctic) to learn about the impacts of Climate Change. Through this journey and immersion in the subject, artists come to care about environmental change and so to act.

With Advance, we aim to take participating organisations on a journey (albeit it a less physically active one) which begins with immersion – in the subject of gender equality – moves through to understanding, which engenders a sense of care, and leads on to action.

Organisations' journeys are experienced in a personal way – organisations of course are populated by people (!) and Lucy and I take a collegial approach. We've each worked for some time in theatre and the performing arts, know and have navigated the landscape in various ways. So, we've tried to work in a straightforward and personal manner, asking participants exactly what they want to explore with us over six months, leading them through a research process, working through and making sense of findings together, then beginning to identify how to translate understanding into organisational action, embedded in structures, systems and planning.

There's an interesting moment in the journey where we take a step back – at that point when understanding needs translation into action – where we don't have the answers, but organisations have the power to come up with them. It's where the magic happens actually. Each organisation will come up with something different – a set of different responses will emerge and the sum of these, and the impact of these is where cultural shift begins to take place.

The process we take organisations through could be flagged as:

Analyse, Think, Change

Statistics play a part in our research and are important, but the qualitative outputs and the understanding of these – of nuance – is where the real power lies. So much of the Advance research is about understanding women's lived experience better, to enable organisations to see with greater clarity, so that they really feel the need for change, so we might instead describe the process as one of:

See, Feel, Change

I like the word 'feel' in there, because it brings me back to the idea of care. If one feels, one tends to care, and if others sense you care, well, they're more likely to come along with you...

+ [Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on Advance 2016](#)

ADVANCE 2014

In 2014 Advance tasked 11 leading theatres from across England to proactively explore how they could achieve greater gender equality on their stages.

Elizabeth Chan in Headlong's Chimerica. Photo: Johan Persson

What We Did | The Process | Participating Theatres | Tonic's Role | Central's Role | See the work

ADVANCE 2014 – WHAT WE DID

Advance ran between October 2013 and May 2014. It tasked 11 leading theatres from across England to proactively explore how they could achieve greater gender equality on their stages.

Crucial to the success of the programme was the 'buy in' it achieved from the participating theatres' leaders; each theatre's contribution to the programme was led by their Artistic Director, Chief Executive, or a senior member of creative staff. Read more about the [theatres that took part](#).

The focus of Advance was kept purposefully tight: it centred on individuals employed in artistic, and generally freelance, capacities by these theatre i.e. as directors, writers, actors, designers (including lighting, sound and video) and other 'creatives'.

The focus of Advance was kept purposefully tight: it centred on individuals employed in artistic, and generally freelance, capacities.

Our previous research told us it was here – rather than in administration, participatory work, producing, or stage management – where women are significantly less likely to be represented than men, particularly at top level in the best resourced, most prestigious theatres. And given that for audiences, their primary interface with the industry is what they see and hear happening on stage (rather than in the wings or administration offices) who it is that is getting to make work there, felt like the best place for Advance to initially focus. It may be that [future iterations](#) of the programme explore other areas such as women in technical theatre, or women in leadership.

Advance was designed to foster collaboration, cross-fertilisation of ideas and mutual support between the 11 theatres. Over the course of six months, they took part in group and one-to-one sessions, conducted [intensive research](#), and were facilitated to examine collectively and within their own organisations how they could move forward. There was a focus on creating new approaches, on innovation, and on looking beyond the theatre industry as well as within it to find ways to create change.

Following the completion of Advance, the theatres have all now put into place firm plans for new ways of working that they will begin to implement over the next 12 months. Advance was tracked by a team of academics from The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Read more about this [here](#).

- + [More about the process](#)
- + [Why these theatres?](#)
- + [See what each of the theatres did](#)

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UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

2016 PROGRAMME FUNDED BY



2014 PROGRAMME FUNDED BY



When it comes to what audiences see and hear on stage, it remains overwhelmingly written, directed, designed and performed by men.

My Generation by Alice Nutter, West Yorkshire Playhouse. Photo: Keith Pattison.

Intro The current picture in theatre But aren't we making progress? Why focus on top roles?

WHY DO ADVANCE?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry. A quick browse through the season brochures of the majority of theatres across the country will show that female names on cast and creative team lists are in the minority. Yes, there are more than there may previously have been, and it might be that in other areas of these theatres – in the admin offices or in the stage management teams – women outnumber men.

But when it comes to what audiences, i.e. the public, see and hear on stage, it remains overwhelmingly written, directed, designed and performed by men.

Of course, theatre is not alone in this. On the public stage, women remain less likely to be seen and heard. At the time of writing, just 147 out of a total of the UK's 650 MPs are female and, even after David Cameron's ostensibly 'female-friendly' July 2014 cabinet reshuffle, just 23% of full cabinet ministers are female. It's a trend that remains in so many areas of public life, from politics to sport, the media to publishing, fashion to film, along with the bizarrely outdated and yet stubbornly persistent assumption that male = universal, and female = niche. One playwright surveyed for Advance's research commented:

"Essentially, men are viewed as people and women are viewed as a minority. I don't think consciously but subconsciously... Why isn't sport on the TV news called 'the men's sport' because it's 95% about men's sporting events? Yet we see 'sport'. And if a women gets reported it's 'a women's event!'"

It's a subject unpacked expertly by Mary Beard in her work on [The Public Voice of Women](#) and indeed, it does seem that the female voice when talking about 'femaleness' is given far greater space and credence than when talking about, well, anything else. In many ways, day-to-day life in most sectors – not, of course, just theatre – is constrained by archaic practices and preconceptions, often out of step with modern aspirations for gender equality. This country is one in which care of children is still primarily viewed as the responsibility of mothers rather than shared equally with fathers, where there is a tendency for rhetoric to focus on 'motherhood' rather than 'parenthood', and where negative effects of parenting on career progression appear to be felt disproportionately by women. Although not relevant to parenting alone, our working culture is largely one that has yet to learn how to turn flexible working, part-time working, or job sharing to the greater advantage. Too often, it is a headache for employer and employee alike.

In the grand scheme of worldwide gender inequality, women in theatre are far from being at the sharp end. But still, making advances in how we in the industry work, think and do is something we should not be complacent about. Theatres are public stages, they give us a platform from which to tell stories; to showcase voices, dream up new worlds, and depict all the possible things that human beings might do. The platform provided by theatre is admittedly a smaller one than that of TV, film, or the media, but it is a platform none the less. Those of us who work in it have a choice: we can either use that platform to try to shift things; to tell stories by and about the whole population, not just a small section of it. Or we can leave things as they are. But if we choose the latter, and simply tell the same stories in the same way over and over again, aren't we – and our audiences – losing out?

"Although the theatre industry is overwhelmingly populated by bright bold women – which is wonderful – the higher you climb, the more the constituency of women thins out. There is still something that is holding us back."

DIRECTOR INVOLVED IN ADVANCE RESEARCH

"In the press, I'm always the 'Former-Actress'. You'd never hear them call Pinter a 'Jewish Former-Actor and Father-of-Three'. No man has ever been written about on paper as a 'Male Playwright'."

PLAYWRIGHT INVOLVED IN ADVANCE RESEARCH

THE CURRENT PICTURE IN THEATRE

Loads of women work in theatre, something consistent with the wider arts industries. In fact, [ArtsHub research](#) found that in 2013/14 the average person working in the arts was female and 34 years old.

However, while administrative staff in theatres, education departments, and increasingly, stage management teams, are female-heavy, when it comes to theatre's main interface with the public; what audiences see and hear happening on stage, it's still significantly less likely to have been written, directed, designed, or performed by women.

Theatre is not unique in suffering from a lack of women in the most visible roles. But where theatre differs to fields such as technology and engineering, is that at entry level, drama is overwhelmingly a female pursuit. Numbers of girls and women enrolled on drama, theatre studies and performing arts courses at school and university level far outnumber boys and men year on year. From a participatory perspective, amateur dramatic groups have traditionally been populated by high numbers of women, as have youth theatres. Tonic's 2012 [research study](#) into opportunities for girls in youth drama found that in a survey of 291 teachers and youth theatre practitioners, three quarters described their organisation as having more girls than boys taking part, or an entirely female membership.

And when it comes to attending theatre productions, it seems women are leading the way. According to research published by Society of London Theatres¹ in 2010, 68% of people attending productions in the West End are female. Among young audience members, the proportion is even higher, with women accounting for 73% of attendees in the 16 to 35 age bracket.

There is a marked difference between the level of women entering the industry compared to the number of those making it to top positions

So there is no lack of women interested in, studying, or attempting to build a career in theatre. But where, it would seem, there is an issue, is in regards to how many women with the requisite talent, commitment and ambition are able to make it up the ladder to the top. How many get beyond student productions, low-or-no-pay work on the fringe, or 'emerging' artist status to attain the most visible creative roles, proper pay, professional recognition, and the opportunity to make well-funded work on this country's best resourced and most prestigious stages? Whereas, for instance, 60% of the young directors who are registered on the [Young Vic's Directors Programme](#) (and who reveal their gender in their personal details) are female, research by [Elizabeth Freestone](#) in the Guardian showed that in the 2011/12 financial year, just 26 productions in the 10 highest subsidised theatres in England² were directed by women, compared to 83 by men.

It goes without saying that creative roles in theatre, like any in the arts, are always going to be intensely competitive, and demand for jobs will far outstrip supply. High rates of drop-off, even among those who start promisingly, are an inevitability and then there is luck to factor in: both in the sense of 'right time right place' and the accidents of birth; of family connections, educational opportunities, financial circumstances, and a myriad of other factors. However the marked difference between the level of women entering, or attempting to enter the industry compared to the number of those making it to top positions suggests that it is women who, to a far greater extent than their male counterparts, drop off or fail to progress up the ladder. And, for as long as we refuse to believe that one half of the population is somehow biologically more gifted at writing, directing, designing or acting in plays than those without a Y chromosome, we have to admit that there is something out of whack about our industry that means talented individuals are failing to thrive.

¹ The West End Theatre Audience, a Research Study for the Society of London Theatres by Ipsos MORI (2010)

² National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Exchange, Royal Court, Leicester Curve, Birmingham Rep, Young Vic, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, Chichester Festival Theatre, Northern Stage

"Inequality is everywhere. I've never had anything spoken to my face, but I look at theatre generally, and I see a predominance of male names everywhere, so it doesn't need to be spoken aloud in order for me to feel it. In fact, I wish it WAS spoken aloud, so I could respond. Pointing at it and bringing it up makes me feel like I'm whining, or bossy, which cunningly pays into the perpetuation of gender stereotype."

PLAYWRIGHT INVOLVED IN ADVANCE RESEARCH

"Do I feel I was massively disadvantaged as a woman? Yes I do. But there was never anything that happened to me along the way I could put my finger on and say 'it's because I'm a woman!'"

DIRECTOR INVOLVED IN ADVANCE RESEARCH

BUT AREN'T WE MAKING PROGRESS?

Brilliantly, yes we are. In 2013, 11 women directed main stage productions for either the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Company, compared to two in 2003 and two in 1993. The last few years have seen a wave of new artistic directors coming into post who are actively engaged in the question of how to address gender inequalities, a significant number of these new appointees themselves women.

Artistically, there's been a reinjection of energy into the exploration of female stories on stage and in particular a desire among some of the country's leading theatres to engage in sophisticated feminist debate via productions such as the National Theatre's [Blurred Lines](#), the Royal Court's [The Mistress Contract](#), and the RSC's [Midsummer Mischievous](#) season. In 2013, Tonic's own book [100 Great Plays for Women](#) was published by Nick Hern Books and sold so fast it had to be reprinted less than a month after release.

But while things are certainly shifting, we're not there yet. The 11 women directing at the NT or RSC in 2013 is progress indeed, but twice this number of productions were directed by men. And while there are more female artistic directors of theatres than ever before, just 36% of those in Arts Council England's National Portfolio are women, dropping down to 24% for organisations in receipt of ACE subsidy even to £500,000 in the 2014/15 financial year. So while we should definitely celebrate our successes, we should not mistakenly believe we are there yet. Nor too should we fall prey to the "there's one" syndrome – we see one female playwright having her work performed on a main stage and give ourselves a pat on the back, feeling the work has been done. Commented the Advance research several playwrights of both genders across on media coverage of young, female playwrights in this respect, with one saying:

"There's a certain amount of fetishising young female playwrights in British media which skews the perception. They seem to be everywhere but actually, it's just that one has come along."

An additional threat to further progress arguably exists in the form of arts cuts, and the consequent atmosphere of anxiety in which risk-taking can feel difficult for theatres. While staging work by or about women certainly shouldn't inherently be seen as 'risky', it is easy to see how the programming of 'box office bankers' – plays coming from an existing canon which is limited in the scope they permit for female stories – could easily swallow up increasingly large proportions of theatres' producing budgets. And as theatres are forced to cut back on the number and scale of productions or increase their co-producing, there will be less work to go round for artists. In tough times, survival of the fittest becomes ever more ferocious. But do we believe in some kind of Darwinian meritocracy of talent; that ultimately, those who possess it will rise to the top? Probably not. Rather, however, it is likely to be Darwinian in the sense that it will be those best adapted to the current conditions who survive and prosper, regardless of whether their talent is the greatest. If we're not careful, rather than the steady but slow march of progress we've been used to towards a more diverse and representative theatre industry, we could find we go backwards. We will have an industry increasingly populated by people who all look, talk, think, and make work, in a very similar way.

In 2012 The Stage quoted outgoing NT artistic director [Nick Hytner](#) forecast optimistically:

"One of the things I can predict with confidence is that – looking at the young playwrights and directors in their 20s and 30s – that by the time they get to be in their 40s and 50s the theatre will be, in terms of sex at least, reflective of the audience that it plays to."

Hytner's picture of the future, while utopic, cannot be taken for granted. The current wave of young female playwrights and directors he refers to is not the first to grace British theatre, and the challenge will be whether we as an industry can better hold onto them than we did their predecessors so that, by their 40s and 50s, they're still with us and making work on an equal footing to their male contemporaries. Hytner's confidence in theatre's ability to achieve equality is wonderful, even if – when it came to employing female artists – the majority of his own tenure at the most heavily subsidised theatre in the country left much to be desired. But given that Nick Hytner, and many of us, believe that we can achieve gender equality, why not try to speed the process up? Surely that's got to be better than condemning female artists to another 20 years twiddling their thumbs and waiting for equal access to opportunity to appear?

"I see too many young women who think they're not good enough and too many young men unable to self-question. Girls are being worn away. Their skills are not being admired."

LIGHTING DESIGNER INVOLVED IN ADVANCE RESEARCH

"There's no security for us. It's job by job."

SOUND DESIGNER INVOLVED IN ADVANCE RESEARCH

WHY FOCUS ON TOP ROLES?

Of course, some artists – regardless of gender – will always opt to work on the smaller scale, or in a way that receives less public recognition or financial recompense.

Some will love the creative freedom that making work on their own brings and will choose to stay there. Others will recognise that their commitment to making brilliant work with a local youth theatre group far outstrips their desire to make a splash in the West End.

But for many theatre artists, economics will necessarily be a driving factor. It is generally recognised that other than for the exceptional few, theatre, and in particular, acting is not well paid. However, with the cost of living escalating, and in particular in London where the greatest concentration of theatre work exists, getting to perform on one of the country's top stages for £500 a week and a credit on your Spotlight page that says you command a similarly respectable wage – rather than in a room above a pub for no pay at all and the danger of appearing happy to work for free – isn't just a case of profile and prestige but, pressing, of financial survival. And it's not just actors. Getting to direct, write or design a show for a main house rather than a studio space might make the financial difference between being able to keep going in what will always be a precarious field for another year or not. Or between being able to do a job because it covers childcare costs, rather than leaves you and your partner out of pocket.

Some women – and men – will always want to work at a lower level. But for many, if they are going to have a career that sustains them financially and creatively, it simply isn't an option.

The question of resourcing goes beyond how much a theatre artist earns in a year. It's also about the level of resourcing in the organisations that do or don't choose to employ them. A talented lighting designer working in a tiny black box space can create powerful effects with just a handful of aged lanterns. But give them a main stage and a full complement of state-of-the-art equipment to play with and they'll really show what they can do. Plus, they'll grow and develop as an artist, break boundaries, push things forward, and generally make the work that enables them to be stretched, fulfilled, and challenged.

In an industry that revolves around visibility and being offered a job on the basis of whether potential employers saw or heard about your last show, being in the most visible slots is key to career progression. As a writer, having your play staged in a theatre's main house as opposed to its small studio space inevitably has an impact on the level of profile your work achieves; greater audience capacity, longer runs, increased chance of being reviewed by the national press, and a hefty chunk of the marketing and PR budgets go a long way to increasing a writer's profile, making landing that next commission all the more likely.

So yes, some women – and men – will always want to work at a lower level. But for many, if they are going to have a career that sustains them financially and creatively, it simply isn't an option.

WHAT WE DID

Advance took an interrogative and methodical approach to understanding the root causes behind the lack of women in key creative roles...

+ More

WHAT WE LEARNED

Rather than settling for quick fixes, Advance tasked the theatres to understand not only where barriers to female talent exist within their organisations, but why...

+ More

WHAT'S NEXT?

Do you think we've missed a crucial area that should be explored next? Do you have thoughts on Advance? We'd love to hear from you...

+ More

Rather than advocating quick fixes, Advance focused on understanding the root causes behind the comparative lack of women in key creative roles.

Almeida Theatre's Chimera Residency, City and Islington College. Photo: Ludovic des Cognets.

The process | Away days | Tonic's Role | Central's Role | 10 findings about the process

THE PROCESS

Advance 2014 was divided into three steps. Before beginning Advance each theatre was asked to write a question they wanted to explore over the duration of the programme.

This was to give each theatre a targeted and focused starting point for their investigation and, following that, a way of helping them stay on track over the subsequent six months.

After deciding on their question, Tonic worked with each theatre to help them break it down into manageable chunks, and to plan and carry out their approach to answering it.

[+ Read the questions the theatres asked](#)

Step One – Investigation

This step centred on the area of focus the theatres selected for themselves via their question. They examined how things are currently working, and sought to understand where barriers to women exist.

This step was about the theatres enhancing their own understanding and asking "why"; it was about them questioning their own thinking and that of others, and about exposing themselves to perspectives and information that may previously have been off their radar. Over all, it was about them being reflective and listening to others, not about them leading or needing to come up with solutions; that would come in Step Two.

Step Two – Innovation

Based on the findings of their investigation, the theatres explored and considered alternative or supplementary ways of working which would go some way towards removing the barriers they had identified.

This step was about dreaming up new ways of doing things, and of challenging existing preconceptions and the 'but we've always done it this way' approach. At the same time, any new approaches had to be achievable, realistic, and deliverable within the theatres' already busy schedules and programmes of work.

Step Three – Action Plans

By the conclusion of Innovation, the theatres had identified something new they would like to trial, and produced an action plan outlining steps towards making this happen. These action plans covered a range of approaches. Some were:

- small and time-limited, others were big and long-lasting.
- designed for use in one organisation, others for the wider industry.
- focused on the operational or 'nuts and bolts' side of how the organisation runs, others focused on artistic output or the creation of new artistic works.

[+ See what each of the theatres did](#)



AWAY DAYS

Although every theatre was pursuing its own question, their findings were of course of interest to one another, and they were encouraged throughout to share their findings, provide provocation to one another, and look for opportunities to create future collaborations.

To facilitate this, Tonic led four Away Days over the course of the programme. These brought the lead members of staff from the participating theatres together in a focused environment and away from their desks, emails and to-do lists. Away Day 1 was hosted by the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, Away Days 2 and 3 by the National Theatre Studio in London, and Away Day 4 by the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Away Days:

- Were an opportunity for the theatres to come together to talk, share progress, make requests of one another, and feel like peers taking part in a collective journey.
- Included input from guest speakers: playwright Moira Buffini, novelist and Founder of the Baileys Prize for Fiction (formerly the Orange Prize) Kate Mosse, and human neurophysiologist Dr Elizabeth Healey who spoke about the physiological differences between male and female human brains.
- Participated in joined up conversations, facilitated by Tonic over matters besides their individual areas of focus but relevant to how broader change could be achieved across the industry.

WHO WAS INVOLVED

ABOUT TONIC THEATRE

Tonic supports the theatre industry to achieve greater gender equality in its workforces and repertoires. We partner with leading theatre companies around the UK on a range of projects, schemes and creative works. Our goal is to give our colleagues the tools they need to ensure more female talent rises to the top.

You can read more about what we do at www.tonictheatre.co.uk

What was Tonic's Role in the Process?

Tonic was on hand to the theatres throughout. The biggest threat to the success of Advance was the extreme workload of all the theatres, and the danger that amidst the manifold time and capacity pressures already placed on them and their staff, Advance would get lost. Consequently, Tonic provided much of the legwork that enabled the theatres to effectively conduct their research. This broke down into a host of activities that included:

- Accessing materials on the theatres' behalf.
- Acquiring information that would fill specific gaps in the theatres' existing knowledge.
- Connecting the theatres with individuals and organisations (inside and outside the theatre industry) that could help them in their investigations.
- Facilitating sessions between various staff and departments within the theatres.
- Conducting qualitative research e.g. running focus groups and conducting interviews.
- Conducting quantitative research e.g. statistical analysis and data capturing.
- Offering provocation, advice and guidance.
- Being a sounding board.

What was The Royal Central School of Speech And Drama's Role in the Process?

The process was tracked by a team of academics from The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

[+ Find out more](#)

10 THINGS THE THEATRES WHO TOOK PART IN ADVANCE SAID WAS USEFUL ABOUT THE PROCESS

- 1 Working as a group, and one which included organisations of different types and scale. This opened the 11 participating theatres up to fresh perspectives, and enabled them to work with those they may never usually come into contact with. They were able to discuss tricky subjects, trouble shoot together, and bounce ideas around. Doing Advance as a group meant none of the theatres were tackling their explorations entirely alone and they provided one another with support and information, for example, by sharing box office data, or being on the end of the phone for one another when they faced a particularly knotty problem.
- 2 Monitoring their own numbers. The theatres were asked to chart the gender of creative team members they had employed over the last decade, an activity which, although not always yielding comfortable results, was incredibly useful in helping them to see where they starkly most needed to make progress.
- 3 Being requested to set themselves a specific area to focus on. Each theatre was asked by Tonic to write a question they would seek to answer over the six months e.g. "what's the experience of touring for women and how can we improve it?" This meant the process felt achievable – no one was being asked to tackle the entire topic of gender inequality in theatre!
- 4 At the same time, hearing the discoveries the other theatres were making, meaning each theatre was only conducting one investigation, but was simultaneously benefitting from learning from those being undertaken by the 10 other theatres in the group.
- 5 Being able to hear the experiences and opinion of freelance artists, but doing so via interviews, focus groups and surveys conducted by a third party (Tonic) and anonymously, meaning the freelancers could be completely candid about their experiences working in those theatres and the wider industry.
- 6 Being equal to a topic to a series of deadlines over the six months. Otherwise, the theatres said, gender equality is a topic that can forever remain on an organisation's 'to-do' list, but can easily get lost in the midst of everything else happening in a busy theatre on a day to day basis.
- 7 Setting aside regular designated time to think about gender equality and their organisation's response to it. In particular, the theatres found the Away Days gave them precious time out of the office to do 'big thinking' individually and with one another.
- 8 Saying they were part of Advance precipitated decisive action for some of the group. Being able to say to colleagues 'we've committed to the aims of Advance so can't justifiably employ an all-male creative team again for our next production' meant creating change became easier and quicker; it was a given that, as Advance theatres, they needed to work harder to achieve gender equality and required the people they employed to do the same.
- 9 Embedding gender equality in internal creative conversations happening anyway. For some of the theatres, Advance came along at a particularly serendipitous time in that they were already in the process of examining specific aspects of their creative output and programmes so made their focus for Advance relate to this – for example, the RSC was already exploring ways it could strengthen its support of its current and past assistant directors and as part of this used Advance to analyse whether there are differences in male and female directors' trajectories. Advance meant gender became an intrinsic part of these conversations, rather than an 'add-on' or forgotten altogether.
- 10 Sharing their successes with colleagues as a way of inspiring wider change. Some of the theatres in the group were already doing really positive discoveries or steps forward during the process within their organisation. Others made really positive discoveries or steps forward during the process which they wished to pass on. Advance enabled them to share these successes with others in the group, thereby increasing their reach and profile.

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

[+ More](#)

PARTICIPATING THEATRES

Advance brought together a mixture of large, mid-scale, and small organisations, and a blend of building-based and touring companies...

[+ More](#)

WHAT WE LEARNED

Rather than settling for quick fixes, Advance tasked the theatres to understand not only where barriers to female talent exist within their organisations, but **why**...

[+ More](#)

Advance 2014 brought together a mixture of large, mid-scale, and small organisations, and a blend of building-based and touring companies.

Crucible Theatre Sheffield. Photo: Paul White Photography.

[Participating theatres](#) | [Their questions](#) | [Tonic's role](#) | [Central's role](#)

PARTICIPATING THEATRES

Tonic approached a range of theatres about taking part in Advance many of whom we'd already been having conversations with or who had expressed their desire to us to make progress in terms of how they work with female theatre artists.

The 11 that joined us for the inaugural version of Advance were:

- [Almeida Theatre](#)
- [Chichester Festival Theatre](#)
- [English Touring Theatre](#)
- [Gate Theatre](#)
- [Headlong](#)
- [Pentabus](#)
- [Royal Shakespeare Company](#)
- [Sheffield Theatres](#)
- [Tricycle Theatre](#)
- [West Yorkshire Playhouse](#)
- [Young Vic](#)

Some of these theatres came on board because they recognised they had further to go when it came to gender equality on their stages; others because they felt they were already taking positive steps and wanted to find ways to amplify this across the industry. What they all have in common is being one of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), meaning they are among the 179 theatre organisations to receive core funding from Arts Council England between 2012-15.

The group encompassed a wide range of size and type of theatre company, from the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#) which has a two auditorium theatre complex, a national and international large-scale touring profile, West End presence, and employs over 1000 people, through to [Pentabus](#) which tours village halls, theatres and festivals and has just four core members of staff. Bringing together a mixture of large, mid-scale, and small organisations, and a blend of building-based and touring companies was a conscious decision on Tonic's part; we wanted to test how different types and scale of theatres would respond to the approach of Advance, and the level of success with which they could work collectively as a cohort. Tonic also recognised that the theatres themselves would benefit from the variety of perspectives a mixed group would automatically present.

[+ See what each of the theatres did](#)

[+ See what we learned](#)

THEIR QUESTIONS

Almeida Theatre

Are living playwrights writing a disproportionately low number of parts for women? If so, what can we do to address it?

Chichester Festival Theatre

There are more women succeeding in getting new plays on stage at the entry level of the profession than there are at a mid-career level. Is there a disconnect between early success and career progression within the wider sector? If so what are the barriers to more established female writers getting their work on stage and how can Chichester Festival Theatre (and other 'Big 11 theatres?') contribute to addressing this disconnect and gender imbalance?

English Touring Theatre

What are the gender specific implications of touring for a woman and how could a company such as ETT address them?

The Gate

"There are fewer women who want to work in lighting and sound design and so it is inevitable they will remain underrepresented in the industry". Is this really the case, and if not, what can an organisation the scale of The Gate do to address it?

Headlong

Does our current commissioning model suit men better than women? If so, what could we do about that?

Pentabus

What are the practical and creative implications for an organisation such as Pentabus when employing pregnant actors? Is there a way Pentabus could usefully support our colleagues in the industry to be more confident about working with pregnant actors?

Royal Shakespeare Company

What is the ladder of progression for an assistant director and is it different for men and women? What can the RSC do to change any discrepancy?

Sheffield Theatres

We acknowledge that we have historically employed more male actors than female. In programming a balanced repertoire across the year, what factors need to be in place to ensure a gender balance in the employment of actors?

Tricycle Theatre

"The Tricycle views the world through a variety of lenses, bringing unheard voices into the mainstream". How can the Tricycle better represent female designers (set, lighting and sound) in its creative teams? Also, both male and female, what can the Tricycle do to broaden the cultural make-up of its creative teams, now and for the future?

West Yorkshire Playhouse

What do we mean when we talk about female-centred stories and what are the ways in which we can we get more of them on our stages?

Young Vic

To what extent do women in the YV's directors and producers networks view themselves as leaders, now or in the future? How could the YV support them to develop their own models of leadership?

Research is a series of discoveries about what is there, but also what is missing or simply forgotten.

Aoife Duffin in Headlong's Spring Awakening

THE ROYAL CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA

ABOUT RCCSD

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama has a long-established reputation as one of the leading providers of professional training for the creative industries. As a college of the University of London, Central is also recognised for the quality of its academic research and publications, attracting public funding from Research Councils (RCUK) and other funding bodies for projects run by Central's industry-connected teaching and research staff.

Dr Katharine Low and Dr Sarah Grochala joined Gilli Bush-Bailey (Professor of Women's Performance History) to track Advance. Central is continuing to develop a 'dynamic research' model that not only documents Tonic's work but also identifies and articulates questions that Advance might pursue and tracks the impact of the project in realising gender equality in the creative theatre industry.

Read more about what we do at
+ www.cssd.ac.uk

An introduction to Central's role in Advance, from Gilli Bush-Bailey, Professor of Women's Performance History.

"The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama is well known as one of the long-established and still leading centres for actor training. Central has its roots firmly in the visionary work of one woman, its founder Elsie Fogerty, who specialised in speech training, and who believed passionately in the social value of theatre and the importance of theatre in education. Today, as a college in the University of London, Central offers a wide range of professional training with undergraduate and postgraduate courses in creative producing, scenography, theatre lighting design, theatre sound, prop making, scenic construction and scenic art which stand alongside the range of acting and applied performance practices.

The industry-connectedness of Central's teaching is enhanced by research-active staff. The quality of their work is reflected in publically funded research projects and numerous academic publications. Central is, perhaps uniquely, in a position to recognise and bridge the gap between the aspirations of the 'real' world of the theatre industries and the potential insights from the real world of academic research. As a provider of professional training many of the equality issues identified by the theatres participating in Advance will be of relevance to our students. In supporting Tonic's work and tracking the process, Central is also participating in the process of identifying questions about how we train, and who we train, for an industry that has yet to fully realise gender equality.

Research is a series of discoveries about what is there, but also what is missing or simply forgotten. Central's research team was invited to participate in the process between the first and second Advance Away Day in the autumn of 2013, as Tonic became aware of the need to document their process and capture some of the early questions and issues the participating theatres were engaged with. As a theatre historian, I am particularly interested in framing that work in the context of cultural shifts and moves toward establishing gender equality that have taken place in the past. Findings from 'forgotten' initiatives remind us of the need to keep research alive and present. In leading the team of three researchers from Central we frame our partnership with Tonic in terms of a dynamic research model that situates Advance in the context of a continuum: a project that has a relationship to past initiatives in raising awareness around gender equality, has a currency today for making changes happen in the creative theatre industry and which can look forward to ways in which future iterations of advance might be advanced and extended.

Acting largely as (silent) witnesses to the proceedings of Advance Away Days, our tracking has enabled us to gather data that can inform future developments for Advance and be useful in evaluating the processes used on the project. But we hope that will be only part of a dynamic research process that will continue to pose questions, stimulate enquiry, and fuel projects that directly engage with the many reasons that gender equality is still an issue in our creative theatre industry."

For more on the engagement between academic research and theatre practice see [our website](#) and for specific questions arising from this project see Bush-Bailey, 'Advance Notice', *Studies in Theatre & Performance*, vol.34, 2, June 2014.

ABOUT ADVANCE

Advance brought together the Artistic Directors, Chief Executives, and senior Creative Staff of a cohort of 11 leading theatres...

+ More

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

WHAT WE DID

Advance took an interrogative and methodical approach to understanding the root causes behind the lack of women in key creative roles...

+ More

ADVANCE

The aspiration for gender equality - not just desirable, entirely possible.

Advance works with England's leading performing arts companies, transforming their aspiration for gender equality into reality. Led by Tonic Theatre, we are removing barriers to female talent both on-stage and off.

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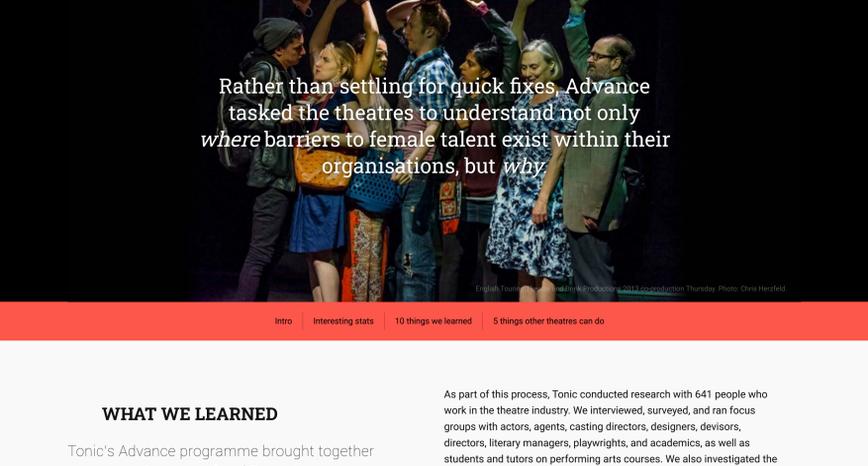


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Rather than settling for quick fixes, Advance tasked the theatres to understand not only where barriers to female talent exist within their organisations, but why

Intro Interesting stats 10 things we learned 5 things other theatres can do

WHAT WE LEARNED

Tonic's Advance programme brought together the Artistic Directors, Chief Executives, and senior creative staff of a cohort of eleven theatres.

These theatres recognised that something was preventing talented women in the theatre industry from rising to the top. They wanted to understand why this was the case, and then lead the way in addressing it.

From October 2013 to May 2014, Tonic worked with them to make this aspiration a reality. It designed and guided them through Advance, a six-month period of research, reflection and activity which tasked them to take an interrogative and methodical approach to understanding the root causes behind the comparative lack of women in key creative roles. Rather than settling for quick fixes or advocating a 'sticking plaster' approach, Advance tasked the theatres to understand not only **where** barriers to female talent exist within their organisations, but **why**.

As part of this process, Tonic conducted research with 641 people who work in the theatre industry. We interviewed, surveyed, and ran focus groups with actors, agents, casting directors, designers, devisors, directors, literary managers, playwrights, and academics, as well as students and tutors on performing arts courses. We also investigated the numbers behind who is making work in England, and on which stages. The findings were massive and far-reaching. There's probably enough data for Tonic to construct a thesis on the subject, but given our time and budget doesn't run that far we've summarised some of the findings here. Of course, if you're interested in accessing our data, or talking through the specifics of what we learned about actors, directors, designers, or writers, you can always make a request via the contact page.

+ 10 key things we learned

These are the key themes that emerged across the research.
+ Interesting stats

Also, here's a roundup of some interesting stats we found.
+ 5 key things theatres can do

We've included some suggestions here for what other theatres, learning from the 11 that took part in Advance, might like to do to move forward themselves.

INTERESTING STATISTICS

Artistic Directors of theatre National Portfolio Organisations

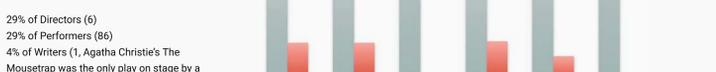
Tonic looked into the gender of artistic directors of the 179 theatres or theatre companies in Arts Council England's National Portfolio¹. We found:

Gender Balance	Size of Subsidy	Larger Organisations	Smaller Organisations
There is a total of 188 artistic directors working across the portfolio (some organisations have more than one artistic director, some have none, the vast majority have one). Of this, 63% are male (119) 37% are female (69)	Within the National Portfolio, the size of subsidy varies significantly between organisations. If looking at NPOs in receipt of more than £500,000 in Arts Council England subsidy in the 2014/15 financial year, the proportion of female artistic directors reduces significantly.	Of the 46 artistic directors working across organisations in receipt of £500,000 or more: 76% are male (35) 24% are female (11)	Whereas female artistic directors are better represented outside of this top bracket. Of the 142 organisations receiving less than £500,000: 59% are male (84) 41% are female (58)

¹ Arts Council England's first National Portfolio was announced in April 2012, a collection of 696 arts organisations (including 179 theatre organisations) which, having been successful in an open application process, were awarded funding for a three year period, replacing ACE's Regular Funding programme. The new National Portfolio for 2015 – 18 was announced in July 2014. [Further information](#)

Whose work is on the biggest, most visible stages

Tonic selected a random evening, Saturday 13th September 2014. From looking at websites and phoning and emailing theatres, we took a snapshot of the number of men and women on stage and in key creative roles in the 20 top subsidised NPO theatres and in the West End. The results were not promising.



² National Theatre, RSC, Royal Exchange, Royal Court, Leicester Curve, Birmingham Rep, Young Vic, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, Chichester Festival Theatre, Northern Stage, Nottingham Playhouse, Bristol Old Vic, Theatre Royal Plymouth, Unicorn, Theatre Royal Stratford East, Belgrade, New Vic, The Lyric Hammersmith, Sheffield Theatres and West Yorks Arts Playhouse are part of this group but had no performances that evening.

³ Members of Society of London Theatres (Criterion, Saint James', Aldwych, Old Vic, Gielgud, Donmar, Globe, Haymarket Theatre Royal, Harold Pinter, Duke of York's, Wyndhams, Trafalgar Studios, St Martin's, Noel Coward, Duchess, Regent's Park Open Air, New London, Fortune, NB, the Royal Court, Young Vic, and National Theatre are part of SOLT but have been counted just once, in NPO figures, although NT transfers (Warhorse, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time) have been included here.

Research into Playwrights

We looked at every new play that received a full production in 2013 across a sample of 12 London theatres: Almeida, Bush, Donmar, Finborough, Gate, Hampstead Theatre, Lyric Hammersmith, National Theatre, Royal Court, Theatre503, Tricycle, Young Vic.

Writers having new plays produced	We then split the theatres in the sample very roughly into two groups: 'larger/primary spaces' (Almeida, Tricycle, Royal Court, Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Olivier, Lyttleton, Hampstead Upstairs, Donmar, Lyric Hammersmith main stage) and 'smaller/secondary spaces' (Gate, Theatre503, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, Cottesloe, NT Shed, Hampstead Downstairs, Bush, Finborough) ⁴ .	Productions in main spaces	Productions in smaller spaces
A total of 72 writers were represented of which: 57% were male (41) 43% were female (31)		In the writers in the larger/primary spaces: 76% were male (26) 24% were female (8)	Whereas for writers produced in smaller/secondary spaces: 36% were male (12) 64% were female (21)

In theatres with multiple spaces	Smaller spaces	Larger spaces
Three theatres within the sample were considered to have multiple spaces: Hampstead Theatre, NT and Royal Court ⁵ .	Within these buildings, in the smaller spaces (Hampstead Downstairs, Cottesloe, Shed, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs) the majority were written by women.	Whereas in the larger spaces (Hampstead Main House, Lyttleton, Olivier, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs) it was almost the inverse.



⁴ This split is imperfect in certain respects, and there is arguably little comparison between a writer having his/her work staged in say the Finborough and the Cottesloe. However, in dividing the spaces, we were attempting to mark the relative distinctions between stage size, auditorium size, level of prestige, and relative financial risk.

⁵ Although the new Bush building has more than one space, these spaces are all of a studio scale so felt less useful to include it in this sub-sample.

Who's Writing What?

In the same sample group as above we looked at the total cast numbers in plays by male and female writers.

Cast on stage	We then wanted to see who was writing what. From the research sample we took it would seem that on average, male writers write fewer roles for women, whereas on average female writers tend to write nearly equal numbers of roles for men and women.	Characters in plays written by men	Characters in plays written by women
Looking at who performed in the plays included in the sample, we found that a total of 294 cast members were male and 205 were female meaning: 59% of casts were male (294) 41% of casts were female (205)		Looking at the total cast numbers we found that plays written by men average out at having almost two men for every woman on stage. 65% male (206) 35% female (111)	While casts in plays written by women averaged out as being roughly 50/50. 48% male (88) 52% female (94)

Are female playwrights less likely to deliver on commissions?

Something many of us involved in Advance had heard given over the years as an explanation for the comparative lack of new plays by women being produced, is that women are less likely to deliver on commissions. Whether this may have been true at some point in the past, who knows, but from the 169 playwrights who took part in an online survey for Advance, it certainly doesn't seem to be the case now.

Have you failed to deliver?
When asked if they had ever failed to complete or deliver on a commission: **13%** of male playwrights said yes **12%** of female playwrights said yes

Do male and female playwrights earn different amounts?

Looking at proportion of income from playwrighting	60% or more of their income	20% or less of their income
From the writers who completed the survey, it does appear that female playwrights earn a lower proportion of their income from writing for the stage. For the 12 months between 1st Jan 2013 and 1st Jan 2014: 26% male playwrights 15% female playwrights	15% of female playwrights said writing for the stage accounted for 60% or more of their income – compared to 26% of male playwrights.	61% of female playwrights said writing for the stage accounted for 20% or less of their income from writing for theatre – compared to 51% of males.

Directing

We were interested to see whether there is a discrepancy between the number of women who embark on careers as directors, and the number who direct at top level. It seems there is.

Young Vic's Directors Network	Graduating directing courses in 2013	Directing in subsidised theatres 2011/12	Directing with the National Theatre or RSC in 2013
There are 1153 people registered as part of the Young Vic's Directors Network. Of the 1121 who state their gender, 60% identify as female, and 40% as male. 40% male 60% female	We took a sample of graduates from eight post-grad Directing courses in England and Scotland. Of the 37 students that graduated from these courses in 2013, 59% were female, and 41% male. 41% male 59% female	However, in contrast, research conducted by Elizabeth Freestone found that in the 2011/12 financial year, in England's 10 most subsidised theatres, just 24% of directors were female. 76% male 24% female	Tonic's research shows that in 2013, just 33% of directors on National Theatre or RSC productions were female. 67% male 33% female

10 KEY THINGS WE LEARNED

The following points are not exhaustive, but provide a summary of the key themes, ideas, and discoveries that emerged across the research. Some are of course simple common sense. Most are relevant not just to gender, but to the question of diversity and equality far more broadly.

- As we move forward, we need to ensure the female artists who rise to the top of the industry represent a range of women; if they all come from the same background or have similar characteristics, there will still be much further to go.**
Gender doesn't function alone. It intersects with a whole range of other characteristics in a person such as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability plus elements of their personal circumstances such as financial status, socio-economic background, and geographical location. Because of this, every person needs to be seen as a unique combination of characteristics and circumstances, any of which may combine to impact on the way in which he or she interacts with the theatre industry, it's far more nuanced than simply saying "women are like this", or "men are like that".
- If you always do really you're always done, you'll be in our industry think, work, and make decisions.**
There are some do really you're always done, you'll be in our industry think, work, and make decisions, most of which have been handed down to us from a time when women weren't anticipated to be equal in the workforce, let alone having their voices and ideas amplified on the public stage. Consequently, many of the barriers to women today are a result of these now outmoded structures. While we don't need to tear the whole thing down and start again, if we're going to make changes so we can have a better, more effective and equitable way for our industry to function, we will need to be self-reflective, analytical, and not settle for saying "but we've always done it like this".
- If left to occur naturally change will happen, but is likely to be unacceptably slow.**
This will take us yet further generations of talented artists. Proactively creating change will require work, time, thought, effort and, in some cases, money. But the results will justify the outlay, if not exceed them. Only when it becomes a core part of what an organisation unquestioningly does as part of its minimum standards – like balancing its production budgets, or ensuring its performance spaces are accessible – will greater gender equality happen.
- Existence is a significant factor, but it's not the only reason women are less visible at senior creative level in the industry.**
There's a myriad of factors to do with work-place environments, behaviour, how we perceive art and artists, and who it is we trust enough to make work on the biggest, most visible stages.
- Having a diversity of decision-makers in an organisation is just as crucial as having a diversity of artists.**
It is perhaps human nature that all of us will feel drawn towards working with certain people, and that when we make decisions about who to employ, a certain amount of cultural bias will be at play: often we will instinctively select people we feel on a similar wavelength to, or with whom we have things in common. But it's for this very reason that theatres need a diversity of people in creative decision-making roles; people with different tastes, backgrounds and perspectives, whether that's on a Board or in a script-reading team. Otherwise, it is less likely certain artists will be championed, or have that all-important chance taken on them when they're starting out or trying to reach the next rung of the career ladder.
- We need to look at where power lies and target our efforts there.**
It may be that part of the solution is in designating additional resources and support for individual female artists. But before that happens, it is crucial that the gatekeepers of opportunity, and those who hold the majority of power in the industry – organisations and leaders – reflect on their role in either inhibiting or promoting equality on their stages. All-female playwrighting groups are good, but if no theatres will put on plays written by those women because they have an unfounded fear that their work won't sell tickets, little meaningful progress will actually be made.
- When an organisation tries to create change, there will always be both opportunities and hurdles, regardless of its size.**
Small organisations can often create internal change far quicker than large ones, yet large organisations generally have resources and clout that smaller ones lack.
- Sometimes imposing quotas or aiming for 50:50 targets isn't the right way to go...**
- ... but sometimes imposing quotas or aiming for 50:50 targets is the only way to go.**
- Equality is not the antithesis of quality.**
Saying you have to employ "the best people for the job" doesn't work unless you're really scrutinising what you mean by "best" (and checking it doesn't just mean who's most visible, who happens to fit a certain traditional mould, or who is like you!)

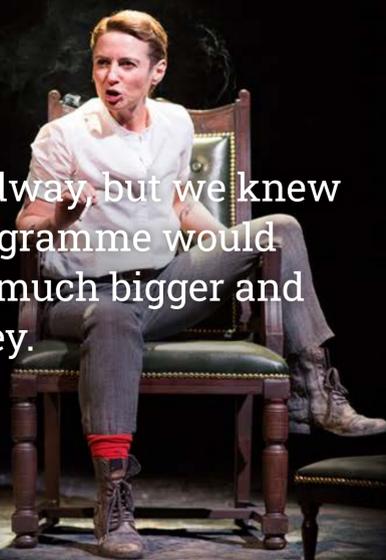
"I think Advance has fundamentally given us permission to include the subject of Gender in all our discussions. It's shone a light on the challenges we face and ignited conversations that are now taking place on a regular basis with regard to programming, creative teams and women on stage."

SARAH NICHOLSON, GENERAL MANAGER, SHEFFIELD THEATRES

5 KEY THINGS THEATRES CAN DO

- Start monitoring where women progress and female creatives they employ.**
It's the best way to see where progress most needs to be made. And it's not only about numbers: not just whether the number of women cast during a season equals those of men, but whether the quality and scope of their roles are as good too. Or whether a theatre that stages the work of a healthy number of female playwrights is doing so on their largest stages as well as in their small studio space.
- Consider how they build relationships with artists.**
Across our board in our research, the pitching process came in for particular criticism with many artists pointing out that confidence comes in many different shapes and sizes, and that the structure of a 45-minute coffee meeting often precludes many of these from being visible.
- Develop mechanisms to better obtain honest feedback from freelancers.**
The research revealed a general lack of transparency between people who work as freelance artists, and people who work in organisations, with the former feeling their employment status is too precarious to proactively initiate conversations with organisations about how they found working in them, and the latter often being too stretched to spend adequate time seeking in-depth feedback from artists. Unless freelancers are given the opportunity to let organisations know anything about their working environment, communication style, working hours etc that has proven problematic or felt uncomfortable to them, those organisations are unlikely to discover where barriers are routinely arising for certain people.
- Work collectively to create a more effective pipeline for female talent.**
According to our research, embarking on a career in theatre isn't necessarily problematic for female artists, but progressing to the same extent as their male counterparts is. All theatres, regardless of size, can play an active role in ensuring the careers of talented female artists don't stall at certain points (in particular, making the transition from studio spaces to main houses seems to be a real sticking point) by communicating more proactively about which artists are ready to move up from smaller stages to bigger ones.
- Consider making gender equality a regular agenda point in staff meetings or Board meetings.**
It's a good way of stopping the matter slipping out of focus for an organisation, particularly during their busiest periods.

Advance made excellent headway, but we knew from the start that the programme would represent just one step in a much bigger and longer journey.



Lisa Dillon in The Merchant of Venice, Royal Shakespeare Company. Photo: Helen Maybanks.

What's Next? | Big questions | Your thoughts

NEXT

YOUR THOUGHTS

Do you think we've missed a crucial area that should be explored next? Are you based in a theatre and would like to work with us? Do you have thoughts on Advance or this website that you'd like to share with us? We'd love to hear from you.

+ Get in contact

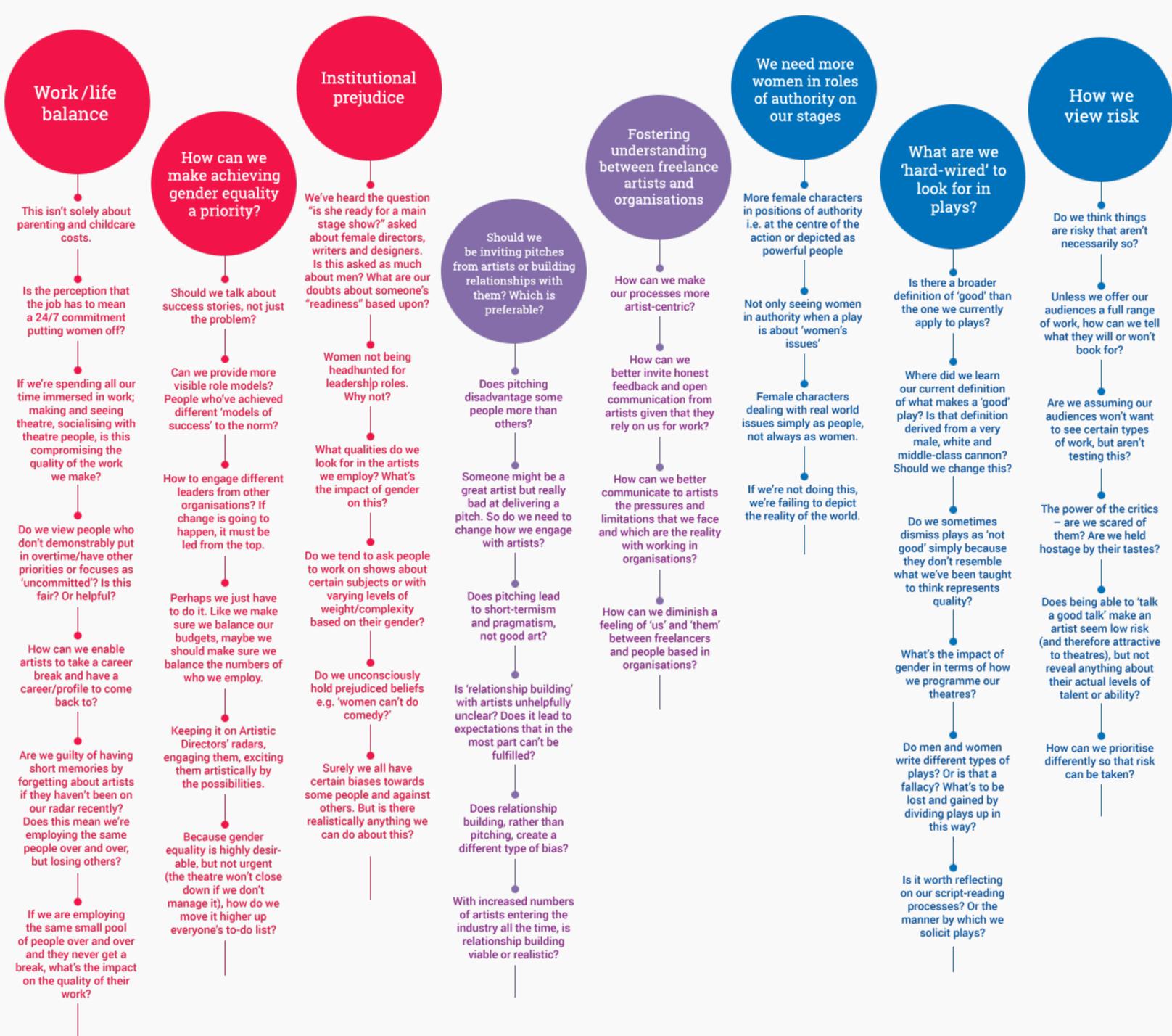
Advance was a six month project. We made excellent headway, but we knew from the start that the programme would represent just one step in a much bigger and longer journey; in itself it would not be a solution. Inequalities that have been years in the making require more than a few short months to reverse!

What Advance did do was scratch the surface of an array of extraordinarily fascinating conversations and questions, some of which were prompted by the 11 theatres, and some by the theatre-makers that took part in the research. There are so many grey areas, conundrums, possibilities, and innovations waiting to happen and of course, many of these go beyond gender alone, but are about how we as an industry can achieve a workforce, artistic output, and audience that genuinely reflects 21st century Britain.

Advance sparked a lot of questions – including some quite thorny ones – many of which we are only at the beginning of engaging with. The chart below is an illustration of some of the conversations we, and hopefully others, might want to now pursue.

How are we making work?

What is the work we're making?



- ALMEIDA THEATRE
- CHICHESTER FESTIVAL THEATRE
- ENGLISH TOURING THEATRE
- GATE THEATRE
- HEADLONG
- PENTABUS
- ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
- SHEFFIELD THEATRES
- TRICYCLE THEATRE
- WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE
- YOUNG VIC



Our Question

“Are living playwrights writing a disproportionately low number of parts for women? If so, what can we do to address this?”

Profile

A small room with an international reputation, the Almeida makes bold new work that asks big questions...

Starting Point

Our question arose out of a difficulty we have had in finding great leading roles for actresses...

What We Did

We wanted to test if our theory was in fact correct and, if so, try to understand why this might be happening...

- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Our experience
- + Creative team stats

- Profile
- Our question
- What we did
- What we learned
- Blog
- Background stats



Lydia Wilson and Oliver Chris in King Charles III, Almeida Theatre. Photo: Johan Persson.

<p>Founded in</p> <h1>1980</h1>	<p>Artistic Director</p> <h2>Rupert Goold</h2> <p>Since 2013</p>		<h2>Profile</h2> <p>A small room with an international reputation, the Almeida began life as a literary and scientific society – complete with library, lecture theatre and laboratory. From the very beginning, our building existed to investigate the world.</p> <p>Today, we make bold new work that asks big questions: of plays, of theatre and how we live.</p> <p>We bring together the most exciting artists to take risks; to provoke, inspire and surprise our audiences; to interrogate the present, dig up the past and imagine the future.</p> <p>Whether new work or reinvigorated classic, whether in our theatre, on the road or online, the Almeida makes work to excite and entertain with extraordinary live art, every day.</p> <p>+ www.almeida.co.uk</p>
<p>Company Type</p> <h3>Building based</h3> <p>We tour work and perform in our own building – one auditorium of 325 seats.</p>	<p>Public Funding</p> <h2>£779,917</h2> <p>Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.</p>	<p>Location</p> <h2>London</h2>	
<p>Productions</p> <h1>5</h1> <p>Opened in 2013, plus 15 visiting companies/co-productions for the Almeida Festival</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>28 Core full-time staff</p> <p>33 Core part-time staff</p> <p>0 Associate roles</p>		

Our Question

Are living playwrights writing a disproportionately low number of parts for women? If so, what can we do to address this?

The question arose out of a difficulty we have had in finding great leading roles for actresses, even in a climate where there are roughly the same number of new plays by men and women being produced. We wanted to test if our theory was in fact correct and, if so, try to understand why this might be happening in order to work out a plan to create more leading female roles.

WHAT WE DID

“Although our specific question was about leading parts for women, we ended up discussing and considering far wider questions about the way in which our industry works and how our day to day practices might be (inadvertently) contributing to ongoing inequalities on stage and backstage and preventing women from taking an equal artistic place at the forefront of our theatre culture”

JENNY WORTON, ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE AND LILLI GEISSENDORFER, PRODUCER

Investigation

Tonic looked at every new play given a full production in a sample of 12 London theatres (Almeida, Bush, Donmar, Finborough, Gate, Hampstead Theatre, Lyric Hammersmith, National Theatre, Royal Court, Theatre503, Tricycle, Young Vic) in 2013. For each piece of new writing they noted the male/female character ratio and plotted that against the gender of the playwright.

What We Learned

There are roughly the same number of new plays being produced by women as by men but there was a significant difference between where these plays were being produced. A new play by a man is more likely to be produced on a large stage and a new play by a woman is more likely to be produced on a smaller stage. The discrepancy is even more significant within buildings with more than one auditorium.

The research also showed that across the sample of new plays produced by these 12 London theatres in 2013, of those written by women, 52% of the cast were female and 48% were male. In those written by men, 35% of the cast were female and 65% were male.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

We need to consider finding both short and longer term actions which gradually reduce the discrepancy and think about to what extent, as a venue with a larger stage, we are impacted by the 'different stages for different genders' finding of the research.

Although we attempted to explore whether it was possible, we were not able to adequately define what constitutes a 'leading' character, because different people defined different characters in the same play as leading. Without this information we are drawing conclusions based primarily on quantitative not qualitative evidence. That said, we did feel that there was enough of a difference in the statistics to make our broad conclusions significant. As well as aiming to commission an equal number of female and male playwrights, we also feel that it is worth raising the question of parts for women in each of our commissioning conversations. Whilst we believe that writers must be free to create work without the onus of fulfilling quotas, we wonder if there is an unconscious bias towards creating male characters. Consequently, we will aim to simply raise the question of female characters as we are in the process of commissioning both male and female writers. In so doing it will be interesting to see whether this affects the statistics for the number of female parts created.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

Ideally we would like to explore whether there is an unconscious (or conscious) assumption about the way we expect to receive narrative and meaning. We suspect that the difference in the number of parts created for women is less about the way writers conceive story as the way theatres programme work and potentially the way audiences receive it. The questions we're interested in talking about in the long-term are to do with the notion of why many more stories feature male protagonists than female and the extent to which this crosses forms from theatre, to television, to film, to novels. For example, is the current success of theatre adaptations from prose an attempt to look for inspiration for leading female characters in a different body of work (as compared to the theatrical canon)? When we consider archetypal character journeys, do we simply have many more male than female examples? In spite of some powerful female characters within our canonical texts (Shakespeare, Greek tragedy) has the dominance of male characters given rise to a way of thinking about drama which is now at odds with modern society? Is it relevant that as an art form, we tend to look back to reviving classic texts as much as we look to the creation of new narratives?

JENNY WORTON, ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE AND LILLI GEISSENDORFER, PRODUCER

“The Advance programme helped us push forward conversations we were already having internally and provided a framework of peer and expert support to take these forward strategically and practically. Most of all, it reassured us that we were not alone in finding it hard both to pinpoint the causes of gender inequalities across our industry, and potential solutions to it.

We found the one-on-one conversations with Tonic's Director Lucy Kerbel particularly fruitful in terms of shaping the nature of the research undertaken and the exact framing of our question. What was unexpected and particularly enlightening was that we also explored what it feels like for smaller companies and individuals to work with larger companies, which was interesting and allowed us to question some of the ways in which we do things practically day to day here at the Almeida. We've thought about ways we can be more open, more welcoming and less intimidating to those not familiar with the internal processes of a larger organisation.

Communication was also a topic we all kept returning to at each Away Day as something we could all be doing better internally and externally to share our values, and be more transparent and inclusive when working with freelance artists and individuals from the relative safety and stability of our organisations.

So although our specific question was about leading parts for women, we ended up discussing and considering far wider questions about the way in which our industry works and how our day to day practices might be (inadvertently) contributing to ongoing inequalities on stage and backstage and preventing women from taking an equal artistic place at the forefront of our theatre culture.”

Background Statistics

Almeida Theatre
Creative teams and writers on in-house productions and co-productions from start of 2003 to end of 2013.



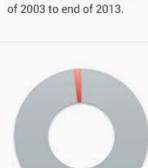
Writers
Female: 21% (13)
Male: 79% (48)



Directors
Female: 12% (6)
Male: 88% (45)



Designers
Female: 25% (13)
Male: 75% (40)



Lighting Designers
Female: 2% (1)
Male: 98% (52)



Sound Designers
Female: 2% (1)
Male: 98% (47)

“Involvement in this project has come at a particularly useful time for us at the Almeida. With our new Artistic Director, Rupert Goold having begun in post in September 2013 it is interesting to view our own past performance in an industry context and to consider these relevant questions as we move into a new artistic phase.”

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple, things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

10 KEY THINGS WE LEARNED

We investigated the numbers behind who is making theatre work in England, and on which stages. The findings were massive and far-reaching...

+ More

5 PRACTICAL THINGS OTHER THEATRES CAN DO

Practical suggestions for what other theatres can do to move forward themselves...

+ More

ALMEIDA THEATRE

CHICHESTER FESTIVAL THEATRE

ENGLISH TOURING THEATRE

GATE THEATRE

HEADLONG

PENTABUS

ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

SHEFFIELD THEATRES

TRICYCLE THEATRE

WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE

YOUNG VIC



Our Question

“There are more women succeeding in getting new plays on stage at the entry level of the profession than there are at a mid-career level. Is there a disconnect between early success and career progression? If so, what are the barriers to more established female writers getting their work on larger stages and how can Chichester Festival Theatre (and other regional producing theatres) contribute to addressing this disconnect and gender imbalance?”

Profile

For over 50 years, Chichester Festival Theatre has been producing world-class theatre...

Starting Point

There are more women succeeding in getting new plays on stage at the entry level of the profession than there are at a mid-career level...

What We Did

We interviewed playwrights and literary and artistic associates from within the industry...

- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Creative team stats

Profile Our question What we did What we learned Background stats



Singin' in the Rain at Chichester Festival Theatre, 2011

Founded in 1962

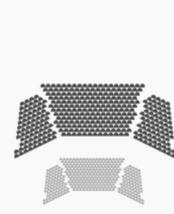
Artistic Director Jonathan Church Since 2006

CHICHESTER FESTIVAL THEATRE

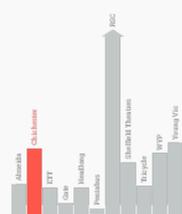
Profile

Chichester Festival Theatre's mission is to create world class theatre experiences that inspire, engage, entertain, empower, inform and challenge our audience, the artists we work with and the many different communities who engage with and participate in our work. Risk, ambition and innovation are at the centre of a theatre making approach that pushes theatrical boundaries and presents audiences with a broader perspective and understanding of twenty first century Britain whilst celebrating the power of tradition.

+ www.cft.org.uk



Company Type Building based With two auditoriums: Festival Theatre (1316 seats) Minerva Theatre (310 seats)



Public Funding £1,640,973 Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.



Location Chichester

Productions 6 Opened in 2013

Staff 60 Core full-time staff 14 Core part-time staff 6 Associate roles

Our Question

There are more women succeeding in getting new plays on stage at the entry level of the profession than there are at a mid-career level. Is there a disconnect between early success and career progression within the wider sector? If so, what are the barriers to more established female writers getting their work on larger stages and how can Chichester Festival Theatre (and other regional producing theatres) contribute to addressing this disconnect and gender imbalance?

CFT took note of Advance research done by Tonic and the Almeida Theatre on the representation of women writers on London stages in 2013. CFT acknowledges that it doesn't have a track record for actively commissioning mid-career level female playwrights for its stages. Over the past eight years, CFT has sought to increase the number of commissions for female playwrights. Understanding why there is such a gender imbalance will help to inform how best to seek out mid-career female writers and help to overcome any conscious or sub-conscious barriers which might lead to these writers being overlooked.

WHAT WE DID

"Unsurprisingly we learnt that there is a clear difference between the percentage of women being commissioned to write for the mid scale/larger stages in comparison to men."

KATHY BOURNE, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

Investigation

Jenny Roberts (on behalf of CFT) interviewed playwrights and literary and artistic associates from within the industry. All were asked a series of open ended questions. The answers were collated and a report written based on the findings.

What We Learned

Unsurprisingly we learnt that there is a clear difference between the percentage of women being commissioned to write for the mid scale/larger stages in comparison to men.

Reasons for this differed from venue to venue. However, there seemed to be a consensus on the following:

When women are approached about a commission, there appears to be a trend in proactively approaching young, new women writers rather than focusing on mid-career women writers. If women writers haven't managed to get their work produced by a certain point in their career, then it is much less likely that they will go on to have a successful career, particularly on the bigger stages.

Venues don't always offer the best support for women writers, who are less likely than men to request help and guidance from the venue and literary departments. The overall experience can prove to be quite negative and venues don't therefore always get the best out of their women writers.

Men tend to promote their work with more confidence and come across as more convincing with their arguments as to why venues should programme their work.

In choosing what to write about, men choose subject matter which traditionally has been considered more suitable for the larger stages.

At a particular point in their career, women often have to turn their attention to childcare. For a period of time, work is of secondary importance, either through choice or necessity.

Historically, more plays by men than by women have been produced and when programming and commissioning, venues look for a successful track record in a playwright. Hence, more men are likely to be approached than women.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

CFT has made a commitment to commission more women writers, over the next five years. However, in order to address the gender imbalance in terms of the size of venue presenting plays by women writers, CFT intends to share information with other venues about who they are working with and which women writers appear to have potential.

In addition, CFT will take full advantage of the excellent relationships it has with literary agents who have a pool of female writers wanting to work at producing houses such as CFT.

Without a literary department, CFT has not always had the time to focus on gender balance when it comes to finding writers to commission. However, the appointment of a new Creative Producer will help enable us to engage writers with whom CFT currently has little or no relationship. Part of the Creative Producer's role will be actively to encourage female writers to pitch ideas to CFT. It is also her responsibility to see more work by women writers which is already being produced elsewhere.

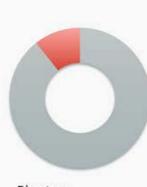
Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

Whilst we have chosen to focus on women playwrights, CFT intends to try and address the current gender imbalance across the creative industry. As an organisation, we have already made some progress by questioning the make up of each creative team and have created opportunities for women within each team, where possible.

CFT is keen to work closely with other venues to ensure that there is a pooling of knowledge in relation to women creatively personnel. There needs to be a collective responsibility for changing a current trend where men still monopolise the key creative positions.

Background Statistics

Chichester Festival Theatre Creative teams and writers on in-house productions and co-productions from start of 2003 to end of 2013.



WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

10 KEY THINGS WE LEARNED

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+ More

5 KEY THINGS OTHER THEATRES CAN DO

Practical suggestions for what other theatres can do to move forward themselves...

+ More

ALMEIDA THEATRE

CHICHESTER FESTIVAL THEATRE

ENGLISH TOURING THEATRE

GATE THEATRE

HEADLONG

PENTABUS

ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

SHEFFIELD THEATRES

TRICYCLE THEATRE

WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE

YOUNG VIC



Our Question

“What are the gender specific implications of touring for a woman and how could a company such as ETT address them?”

Profile

English Touring Theatre is one of the UK's most successful and exciting production companies, widely regarded as England's National Theatre of Touring...

Starting Point

We are aware that touring is often hard for companies, and while we have a general interest in making it easier for everyone we realised we had never considered the gender specific implications of touring...

What We Did

We learned that most of our assumptions about why touring is hard are correct, and that the hardest aspect is accommodation. As a result we are upgrading and improving our digs list...

- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Watch video interview
- + Creative team stats

Profile Our question What we did What we learned Video interview Background stats



English Touring Theatre and Brink Productions 2013 co-production Thursday. Photo: Chris Herzfeld

<p>Founded in</p> <h1>1993</h1>	<p>Director</p> <h2>Rachel Tackley</h2> <p>Since 2008</p>		<p>Profile</p> <p>English Touring Theatre is one of the UK's most successful and exciting production companies, widely regarded as England's National Theatre of Touring.</p>
	<p>Public Funding</p> <h2>£691,422</h2> <p>Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.</p>	<p>Location</p> <h2>London</h2>	<p>Led by Director Rachel Tackley, the company works with leading artists to stage an eclectic mix of new and classic work for audiences throughout the UK and overseas; theatre that is thrilling, popular and, above all, entertaining.</p> <p>The company primarily produces work for larger theatres, driven by the belief that experiencing plays simultaneously with large numbers of other people is a distinctively powerful cultural experience for audiences. English Touring Theatre is the only touring company with public investment, to produce work for larger theatres in England. At the heart of everything the company does is the passionately held belief that people everywhere in this country expect and deserve the very highest quality of work.</p> <p>+ www.ett.org.uk</p>
<p>Company Type</p> <h2>Touring</h2> <p>Touring company producing work for larger theatres in the UK and internationally.</p>	<p>Productions</p> <h1>3</h1> <p>Opened in 2013</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>5 Core full-time staff</p> <p>2 Core part-time staff</p> <p>4 Associate roles</p>	

Our Question

What are the gender specific implications of touring for a woman and how could a company such as ETT address them?

We are aware that touring is often hard for companies, and while we have a general interest in making it easier for everyone we realised we had never considered the gender specific implications of touring and whether there was anything we could and should be doing to make it safer for women specifically.

WHAT WE DID

“It’s a question I get asked quite a lot: what’s it like being a woman in theatre? I’ve never really been able to answer it, or know how I’d answer it on behalf of anyone else I work with. Advance seemed like a really fascinating way of actually trying to hone down where we are as an industry.”

RACHEL TACKLEY, DIRECTOR, ENGLISH TOURING THEATRE

Investigation

Tonic conducted research with a group of actors who had toured with ETT and gathered together the information, then shared it with us.

What We Learned

We learnt that most of our assumptions about why touring is hard are correct, and that the hardest aspect is accommodation and staying in digs which you can't control and often have little information about. The main gender specific element is personal safety – we realised that actresses and female stage managers may not know when bookings their digs whether the route home is (or feels) unsafe. However the most important element overall (and which is less gender specific) is information regarding digs – not always knowing what facilities there would be and what condition they would be in.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

We are upgrading and improving our digs list to include photos of rooms, volunteered by hosts, and asking them questions regarding the route from the theatre to the digs. We will also start asking acting companies who review digs to comment on how safe they felt the area in which the digs are situated were.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

Yes in that we are always trying to improve the experience of acting companies being on tour, and we naturally value the safety of our touring companies very highly. However this upgrade work is also an end in itself which we hope will make a great difference to the touring experience for our companies.

English Touring Theatre Director Rachel Tackley and Associate Producer Caroline Dyott discuss their experiences of Advance. The checklist from Sweden that Caroline mentions can be found [here](#).

Background Statistics

English Touring Theatre Creative teams and writers on in-house productions and co-productions from February 2003 to February 2014.



WHY DO THIS WORK?

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+ More

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WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE

YOUNG VIC



Our Question

“Men are more naturally drawn to lighting and sound design. Is this true? And if not how can access to these roles be made more equal?”

Profile

The Gate is a home for anarchic spirits, invigorating theatre, and restless creative ambition...



Starting Point

There is a massive imbalance between the number of men and women that work in lighting and sound design...



What We Did

We interviewed student designers, their teachers and experienced professionals of both genders...



- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Watch video interview
- + Creative team stats

Profile | Our question | What we did | What we learned | Video interview | Background stats



Idomeneus at the Gate Theatre. Photo: Bill Knight.

Founded in
1979

Artistic Director
Christopher Haydon
Since 2012

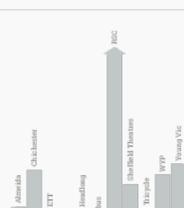


Profile

"The Gate is our oxygen. It should be on the NHS."
Bill Nighy



Company Type
Building based
With 1 auditorium (seating 75-90 depending on layout), occasionally tour as extra activity



Public Funding
£311,570
Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.



Location
Notting Hill, London

The Gate has been inspiring audiences and artists alike for 35 years. We are a small theatre but we always Think Big.

We are a home for anarchic spirits, invigorating theatre, and restless creative ambition. We welcome anyone who wants to change the world. In our ever transformable, 70 seat space we confront and debate the biggest questions that face humanity and act as a loudspeaker for unheard voices from across the globe. We are known to springboard the most exceptional new talent into becoming the theatre leaders of tomorrow. No two visits to the Gate are ever the same.

+ www.gatetheatre.co.uk

Productions

5
Opened in 2013

Staff

6 Core full-time staff
2 Core part-time staff
11 Associate roles



Our Question

“Men are more naturally drawn to lighting and sound design.” Is this true? And if not how can access to these roles be made more equal?

There is a massive imbalance between the number of men and women that work in these roles. We were interested in the underlying philosophical questions about whether this is because certain jobs are more attractive to one gender or another or whether it is simply evidence of bias in recruitment and training opportunities. We wanted to explore how more women could be encouraged in to these roles.

WHAT WE DID

"We were struck by the apparent difference in confidence that was demonstrated by male and female students. Anecdotally, men tended to be happier to assert that they could do something new even if this was not the case."
CHRISTOPHER HAYDON, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND CLARE SLATER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Investigation

Tonic did a lot of primary research – interviewing student designers, their teachers and experienced professionals of both genders. We met with various experts in the field and had discursive conversations about both the nature of the work itself and the working conditions that may play a part in gender selection for these roles.

What We Learned

A key issue that came up repeatedly was the challenge of doing a job that required the usual long hours associated with technical rehearsals – particularly when one has young children. We were also struck by the apparent difference in confidence that was demonstrated by male and female students. Anecdotally, men tended to be happier to assert that they could do something new even if this was not the case. Women as a result tended to learn more because they were less quick to assume they knew the answers. But this reticence can be read as a lack of confidence and can harm employment prospects.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

We want to develop a scheme to focus on giving greater opportunities to young female lighting and sound designers to get more experience in this field.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

We have an overarching aim at the Gate to increase access to the arts and to act as a 'teaching theatre' so this sits closely with some of our core goals.



Watch the interview with Christopher Haydon, Artistic Director, Gate Theatre.

Background Statistics

Gate Theatre
Creative teams and writers on in-house productions and co-productions from start of 2003 to end of 2013.



Writers
Female: 28% (23)
Male: 72% (58)



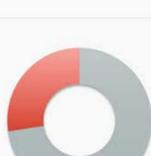
Directors
Female: 59% (40)
Male: 41% (28)



Designers
Female: 51% (29)
Male: 49% (28)



Lighting Designers
Female: 20% (11)
Male: 80% (45)



Sound Designers
Female: 27% (14)
Male: 73% (37)

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SHEFFIELD THEATRES

TRICYCLE THEATRE

WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE

YOUNG VIC



Profile
Headlong creates exhilarating, award-winning theatre for audiences across the UK.

Starting Point
Like a lot of theatres, Headlong has less favourable statistics when it comes to women taking key roles in creative teams...

Our Question
"Does our current commissioning model suit men better than women? If so, what could we do about that?"

What We Did
The results of our research clearly demonstrate that there is an industry-wide disparity between male and female writer's...

+ What we learned
+ What we're doing differently
+ Read Sam Potter's blog post
+ Creative team stats

Profile Our question What we did What we learned Blog Background stats

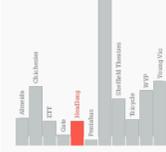


Founded in **1998**
1998 (As Oxford Stage Company)
2005 as Headlong

Artistic Director **Jeremy Herrin**
Since 2013

Headlong

Profile
Headlong creates exhilarating, award-winning theatre for audiences across the UK. We interrogate the contemporary world through a programme of fearless new writing, radically re-imagined classic texts and potent 20th century plays. We position the next generation of theatre makers alongside artists of international standing and challenge them to create the most inventive theatre they can imagine. Headlong places digital innovation at the heart of what we do; building unique online experiences to sit alongside our productions and enrich our audiences' engagement with the work.



Company Type
Touring
Headlong tours work nationally and internationally

Public Funding
£691,422
Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.

Location
London

Productions
5
Opened in 2013

Staff
4 Core full-time staff
6 Core part-time staff
1 Associate roles



Our Question

Does our current commissioning model suit men better than women? If so, what could we do about that?"

Like a lot of theatres, Headlong has favourable gender statistics when it comes to numbers of women employed across the company, but less favourable statistics when it comes to women taking key roles in creative teams. We are committed to improving this in the future and in order to move towards this aim, we are first looking at how we can improve gender balance with writers. Over the last 7 years, Headlong have produced 9 new plays (5 written by men and 4 written by women) and employed 11 writers to do new versions of existing plays (8 male writers and 3 female writers). Overall this works out at 35% female writers to 65% male.

WHAT WE DID

"The fact that there was an almost scientific approach to Advance felt really reassuring. It feels that with the proper data we can work out where the blockages are and we can do things about them. So rather than it being this big, generalised, slightly fearsome subject that no one wants to get involved in, it's feeling more realistic and one we can do something about."

JEREMY HERRIN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Investigation

We put out surveys to both male and female writers and to agents, we held discussion groups with male and female writers, met with Literary Managers from several other participating theatres and did some number crunching on our previous productions.

What We Learned

The results of the research clearly demonstrated that there is an industry-wide disparity between male and female writer's – on average, female playwrights write more plays, get fewer plays on and get paid less. It was also clear that women perceive that they are treated differently because of their gender (60% compared to just 25% of men).

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

Identifying the exact cause of the disparity was difficult to pinpoint but we did identify these key areas which we feel we can address:

- Supporting the current crop of exciting female voices from the studio to the main stage.**
A number of very exciting female writers have emerged in the last 10 years, many of whom came from the Royal Court and many of whom our Artistic Director, Jeremy Herrin has already worked with. We want to ensure that these writers develop from the studio to the main stage which means investing in their development and giving them commissions which enable them to stretch themselves – for example giving young female writers their first adaptations of existing plays.
- Improving the way we work with writers on commission.**
There was a clear message from all the writers (both male and female) that theatres don't always communicate well with writers about commissions that are given. As a result, writers don't feel they can share work at early stages, don't ask for development time if they need it and in some cases don't deliver at all because of lack of contact. Nearly all the writers were basically unsure of what theatres structures were regarding writers commissions.
- Improving the way we talk to female writers.**
Feedback from the female writers, both on the survey and in the discussion groups, suggested that women are getting confusing and often quite off-putting messages from theatres about 'what women write about' quite early on in their careers. Several women reported being told – 'women write this sort of play/men write that sort of play' and several women reported being told their work was intimate and suitable for smaller stages when they felt it wasn't. Several agents also supported this view. Women also appear to feel a pressure to 'not write' about particular subjects because they will be too female.
- Improving general writer information/first access.**
A generalisation no doubt, but one of the more worrying things which came up from the research was that some writers had a worrying lack of knowledge about how the profession works and had some odd perceptions about what theatres wanted from them. This appeared to come from a lack of sharing knowledge with other writers.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

Our ultimate aim is to achieve gender equality in creative teams across our organisation. We will start by targeting writers, but intend to move on to directors where we would like to achieve gender parity amongst freelance directors. We would then like to move on to looking at ways of working with more female lighting and sound designers. We have already achieved gender parity with regard to set designers and core staff members.

"I found it really inspiring, to be in a room of people who were setting their minds and their imaginations to what feels like a particular problem. It was wonderful to be with a group of people who, by hook or by crook, are going to change the landscape. And by starting to talk about it and articulate these problems and to voice some of these questions, I think that change is already in process."

JEREMY HERRIN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

ADVANCE – AN EYE OPENER

Written by Sam Potter, Creative Associate at Headlong

The greatest benefit of taking part in something like Tonic's Advance programme is in having your own perceptions challenged, and that was certainly what happened to me. Headlong were late to the party in joining Advance. The programme had started two months before I was appointed, and one of my first decisions as Headlong's Creative Associate was to approach Tonic's Director Lucy Kerbel and ask her if we could join the group.

We already knew that gender equality was going to be a priority for Headlong moving forward and I wanted to be at the forefront of any movement for change happening within the industry.

I started out considering myself to be a fully signed-up member of the campaign for gender equality in the theatre. When I was the Literary Manager at Out Of Joint, prior to joining Headlong I had conducted my own research into female writers. I had written an article for The Guardian about my findings. I work in a key role within a company where I am able practically to make change happen. I didn't have anything to learn, did I?

Well, as often happens when you genuinely open yourself up to new ideas, it turned out that, in fact, I did.

At the first away day session I attended, at the National Theatre Studio in January 2014, one of the first things to sound my thinking was the Gate's research into women working as sound and lighting designers. I had been focusing on directors and writers – it's the area of the theatre I am in a position to effect – but realising the figures for female lighting and sound designers were so much worse, really made me think. It made me fully appreciate that change can't just come for one group of women. It needs to come for all of us. It can't just be about the people with their names at the top of the posters, it's got to be about the whole profession.

The away days carried on challenging me with interesting questions; could technical rehearsals be run differently to the macho three-day-blitz model we tend to favour in the UK? Do we pay and schedule the parents we employ appropriately? Should we, as theatre companies, be more transparent about our gender statistics? Are quotas the only way to enact actual change? Do we view male and female directors differently? Should we encourage the Arts Council to keep more detailed information on gender statistics amongst freelance staff? Could we create a London-wide childcare scheme that enables actors in London to help one another? All important and stimulating food for thought.

From Headlong's own detailed research into how we could work better with female writers we discovered that though the statistics could tell us what is happening, they didn't tell us anything about why.

The answer to that question lay entirely in the grey areas – the female writer who feels stifled because she feels she can't write about domestic subjects; the writers who think they might not have progressed because of their gender but have no proof; the woman who lacks confidence to pitch but doesn't know how to do it differently.

From looking at the problem in this complex way we were able to identify significant trends amongst writers and respond to them, which is why this year at Headlong we will be launching two new long term initiatives for writers – a writers group (kindly supported by Charles Diamond) aimed at supporting writers from studio spaces onto our main stages, with a particular focus on female playwrights and a three-year partnership with Blacklisted Films, aimed at developing Emerging Writers.

The biggest thing I got from Advance however, was the initial thrill that came from walking into a room on the first day and discovering that the RSC, the Tricycle, the Almeida, Pentabus, The Gate, Sheffield Theatres, ETT, the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Young Vic and Chichester were all just as concerned about improving gender balance in the theatre as we were, and that they were all just as committed to making it happen. That first moment gave me a thrill of optimism that change was possible. This hasn't left me and it has been crystal clear from everything we did with Advance that change has to come from an industry-wide movement. It's not possible for any one company to address gender inequality alone. We have to work together because we are so interconnected. The brilliant lighting designer working at the Gate today will almost certainly become the brilliant lighting designer at Headlong in the very near future.

The genius of the Tonic Advance programme has undoubtedly been the bringing together of lots of different theatres to address this complex problem together.

Sam Potter, Creative Associate, Headlong

Background Statistics

Headlong
Creative teams and writers on in-house productions and co-productions from 2006 to 2014.



WHY DO THIS WORK?
The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...
+ More

10 KEY THINGS WE LEARNED
We investigated the numbers behind who is making theatre work in England, and on which stages. The findings were massive and far-reaching...
+ More

5 KEY THINGS OTHER THEATRES CAN DO
Practical suggestions for what other theatres can do to move forward themselves...
+ More



Our Question

“What are the practical and creative implications for an organisation such as Pentabus when employing pregnant actors? Is there a way Pentabus could usefully support our colleagues in the industry to be more confident about working with pregnant actors?”

Profile

Pentabus is the nation's rural theatre company. We develop and produce quality new theatre about the contemporary rural world...



Starting Point

We realised there were many things we could do to support pregnant actors better and felt this might be something useful for the wider industry too...



What We Did

The big thing we'd like to do from this work is to create a pregnancy pack for both actors and organisations...



- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Our response
- + Creative team stats

Profile Our question What we did What we learned Background stats



Blue Sky by Clare Bayley, 2012

<p>Founded in</p> <h1>1974</h1>	<p>Artistic Director</p> <h2>Elizabeth Freestone</h2> <p>Since 2012</p>	<p>PENTABUS RURAL THEATRE COMPANY</p>	<p>Profile</p> <p>Pentabus is the nation's rural theatre company. We develop and produce quality new theatre about the contemporary rural world. We tour the country with plays that have local impact and national resonance. We turn up in peoples' village halls, theatres and digital backyards, connecting audiences nationwide.</p> <p>+ www.pentabus.co.uk</p>
<p>Company Type</p> <h3>Touring</h3> <p>Pentabus is based on a farm in Shropshire and tours nationally</p>	<p>Public Funding</p> <h2>£190,536</h2> <p>Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.</p>	<p>Location</p> <h3>Shropshire</h3>	
<p>Productions</p> <h1>5</h1> <p>Opened in 2013</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>5 Core full-time staff </p> <p>1 Core part-time staff </p> <p>0 Associate roles</p>		

Our Question

What are the practical and creative implications for an organisation such as Pentabus when employing pregnant actors? Is there a way Pentabus could usefully support our colleagues in the industry to be more confident about working with pregnant actors?

We are proud to be a company that supports male and female artists equally across all areas of our organisation. We happen to have worked with a number of pregnant actors over the last couple of years and are aware, through conversations, they have had varying experiences, good and bad, of employment whilst being pregnant. We realised there were many things we could do to support pregnant actors better and felt this might be something useful for the wider industry too.

WHAT WE DID

“The focus of our Advance work has been about working with pregnant actors. As well as the learning we've done about admin, health and safety etc. it's made us really interrogate much bigger creative questions too. What do audiences feel about watching a pregnant actor on stage? What does it mean for the character? How do writers, actors, designers and directors talk about pregnancy in creative terms? All bold, empowering questions that will influence our work, both practically and artistically.”

ELIZABETH FREESTONE,
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Investigation

We put out an anonymous survey for actors to fill in. We spoke to various HR, legal, and healthcare experts. We spoke to casting directors, directors and actors. We researched current advice and working practices.

What We Learned

That although there are some examples of good practice, there is a large amount of uncertainty around the idea of employing pregnant actors. Some organisations are misinformed, nervous, or even obstructive to the idea.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

The big thing we felt we'd like to do is create a pregnancy pack. This will be a document that goes through all of the considerations and responsibilities for both actors and organisations. We hope to cover things like: who an actor should tell and when; what processes a company should have in place; issues of health, insurance, contracts, safety etc, as well as looking at creative choices and questions of taste and performance.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

Our aim is to be a brilliant employer for pregnant actors. And to disseminate the way in which we do this across the whole theatre industry, with particular focus on touring companies.

“The Advance programme has been really interesting for us. We've seen how, as a small organisation, we can be fleet-of-foot with implementing change and make big steps quickly. But we've also learned from the bigger companies that change needs to be seeded in every part of an organisation, top down to bottom up. It's a mind-set as well as a system. What's been heartening to know is that there are multiple practical things we can all do – big organisations and small – to make change a reality. The Advance toolkit we've now all got in our back pockets is invaluable. The focus of our Advance work has been about working with pregnant actors. As well as the learning we've done about admin, health and safety etc. it's made us really interrogate much bigger creative questions too. What do audiences feel about watching a pregnant actor on stage? What does it mean for the character? How do writers, actors, designers and directors talk about pregnancy in creative terms? All bold, empowering questions that will influence our work, both practically and artistically.”

ELIZABETH FREESTONE, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Background Statistics

Pentabus
Creative teams and writers on in-house productions and co-productions from 2003 to 2013.



WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

10 KEY THINGS WE LEARNED

We investigated the numbers behind who is making theatre work in England, and on which stages. The findings were massive and far-reaching...

+ More

5 KEY THINGS OTHER THEATRES CAN DO

Practical suggestions for what other theatres can do to move forward themselves...

+ More



Our Question

“What is the ladder of progression for an assistant director and is it different for men and women? What can the RSC do to change any discrepancy?”

Profile

Our job is to connect and help others connect with Shakespeare and produce bold, ambitious work with living writers, actors and artists...



Starting Point

Over the last 10 years the route for a director has changed significantly...

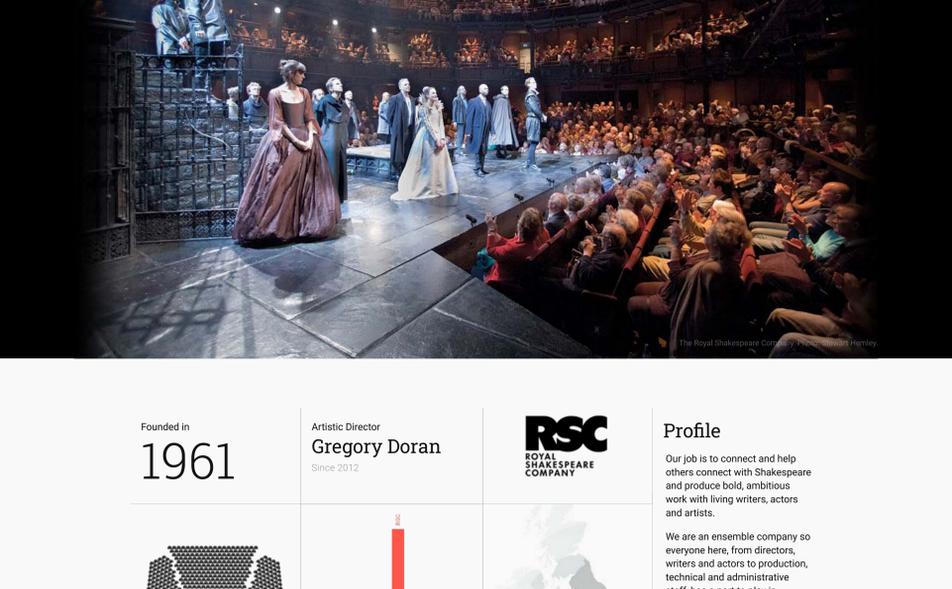


What We Did

We met with industry colleagues, undertook an online survey and ran focus groups...



- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Watch video interview
- + Our response
- + Creative team stats



Founded in **1961**

Artistic Director **Gregory Doran**
Since 2012



Profile

Our job is to connect and help others connect with Shakespeare and produce bold, ambitious work with living writers, actors and artists.

We are an ensemble company so everyone here, from directors, writers and actors to production, technical and administrative staff, has a part to play in creating distinctive theatre.

We believe in taking risks and pushing creative boundaries – finding new ways of doing things and learning through action. Our audiences are at the heart of all we do and we want to challenge, inspire and involve them.

Our home is in Stratford-upon-Avon and in 2010 we reopened the Royal Shakespeare and Swan theatres after a £112.8m transformation to bring actors and audiences closer together. We play regularly in London, Newcastle upon Tyne and on tour across the UK and the world.

As well as the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, we produce new work from living artists and develop creative links with theatre-makers from around the world.

We work with teachers to inspire a life-long love of Shakespeare in young people and run events for everyone to explore and participate in our work.

We commission and develop a wealth of new work. Our creative culture inspires writers to experiment with new ideas. It also allows us to investigate the classics with a fresh, inventive eye.

We encourage our playwrights to write large-scale, ambitious plays and to put death, beauty and metaphor back on stage.

+ www.rsc.org.uk

Company Type

Building based

We tour work and perform in our own building:
Royal Shakespeare Theatre (1040 seats)
Swan Theatre (460 seats)
Courttyard Theatre (1060 seats)

Public Funding

£16,035,801

Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.

Location

Stratford upon Avon

Productions

13

Opened in 2013

Staff

Over 1000

We employ just over 1000 members of staff, including the acting companies.

Our Question

What is the ladder of progression for an assistant director and is it different for men and women? What can the RSC do to change any discrepancy?

Prior to the arrival of the Advance project we had been actively analysing our relationships with our assistant director alumni. We are developing a creative fellowship for these alumni and had just started consulting with a small group of current and past assistant directors on what this might be.

Alongside this there had been discussion on women within theatre, inspired by or perhaps inspiring some of our current work including the Roaring Girls Season – strong significant parts for women in Jacobean theatre – often unseen on our stages due to the nature of the plays of Shakespeare, his contemporaries and indeed previous choices of programming. And Midsummer Mischief, a festival of four new plays all written by female playwrights with strong female parts and a predominantly female cast.

WHAT WE DID

“We were educated, we laughed, we were shocked and disheartened about what we heard but also provoked and inspired by the discussion, our investigations and our colleagues in the industry we were lucky to work with.

Aside from the practical actions we can and should take to support and improve the trajectory of emerging directors, we learned that the RSC should be more transparent about what we do currently and what we’re going to do. We should consult and involve industry colleagues in our work with directors and our planning for the future.”

ERICA WHYMAN, DEPUTY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND ZOE DONEGAN, PRODUCER AND CLAIRE BIRCH, ASSISTANT PRODUCER

Investigation

To investigate our question – along with Tonic Theatre we undertook the following research:

Meetings with industry colleagues

RSC Assistant Producer Claire Birch and Tonic Director Lucy Kerbel met with:

- Amy Hodge, Associate, NT Studio – to find out how the NT works with Staff Directors.
- Chris Haydon, Artistic Director and Clare Slater, Executive Director at The Gate – as a smaller, ‘entry-level’ theatre for directors.
- Mark Rosenblatt, Associate Director at West Yorkshire Playhouse – in addition to his work with directors at WYP, Mark is Amy Hodge’s predecessor at the NT Studio, and heavy involved with the JMK Directors Award.

Claire Birch, Lucy Kerbel and RSC Producer Zoe Donegan also met with:

- Vicky Featherstone – Artistic Director of the Royal Court.
- Sue Emmas – Associate Director at the Young Vic who looks after The Young Vic Directors Program.

Alumni

- We updated our alumni assistant directors list and contacts to start from 1993.
- We put together an online survey using RSC software to capture quantitative data to include statistics on: volume of assisting and when, continuing to work as a director and or assistant director, not working as a director and doing other work, work alongside directing, income related data and directing qualifications and awards. The survey could be completed anonymously if preferred. This went out to the RSC alumni list and many of the other members of Advance sent it to their alumni assistant directors. We had 68 responses.
- Tonic ran four focus groups with RSC alumni covering recent female alumni (in the last three years), less recent female alumni (in last 5-7 years), male alumni from over a range of time and female alumni who are well established directors. As some were unable to attend the focus groups Lucy held one-to-one interviews in order to hear their feedback.

Other

- We put together with Tonic’s help a list of all directing training, schemes and awards.
- Tonic supplied us with recorded interviews of directors at different stages of their careers.
- We discussed our question informally with Advance members at away days.

What We Learned

- 1 Over the last 10 years the route for a director has changed significantly.
- 2 The industry has changed due to many factors including the financial climate: companies across the industry are reluctant to take risks and it’s now often prohibitively expensive to produce plays on the fringe.
- 3 There appears to be many more emerging and early to mid-scale directors, perhaps due to the increase in training opportunities eg: university and drama school places and directing being seen as a viable career choice.
- 4 Further to the point above there are very few directing opportunities for freelance directors and this is due to companies being unable to take risks and the majority of plays being directed by artistic or associate directors often to save money. This has contributed to the large numbers of early to mid-scale directors who are unable to progress.
- 5 The majority of the emerging directors consulted felt that assisting was the best way to further their career.
- 6 Gender – there is some positive discrimination but the most important thing is to get the right director in, on the right project, and some positively discriminate more consciously than others.
- 7 Women have an additional hurdle (that rarely affects men) in mid-career pregnancy, some women directors choose not to have children, have stopped at one child or have been unable to return to work. This is due to a number of reasons including: monetary constraints, having been unseen for a period of time and unable to ‘get back’ into the industry. Those that do return to work often feel compromised in work and at home.
- 8 Some female directors but also some male directors reported challenges in terms of ‘selling’ themselves in meetings and in pitching opportunities. This can be considered wider than a gender issue with economic background, ethnicity and education being other contributory factors.
- 9 It was felt that the RSC could do a lot to progress our assistant directors and indeed emerging directors and prepare them for their professional lives as a director.

What we want to do in response to what we learned

To enable the directors that come through the RSC:

- To develop and widen their skills in their art, artistic interests and ambitions.
- To take full advantage of the opportunities the RSC can offer them.
- To understand the industry with its current issues and opportunities to make relevant decisions on their careers.
- To equip them to be able to navigate the industry in an informed and pertinent way.
- To empower them as Directors in their own right.

A Step Towards a Bigger Goal

- Ensuring that RSC assistant director alumni are regarded highly and are sort after within the industry.
- Establishing a successful RSC assistant director creative alumni fellowship that is seen as a benchmark within the profession.

Watch the interview with Erica Whyman, Deputy Artistic Director at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

We thoroughly enjoyed working on Advance; the lunches on the away days were amazing! We loved having the group in Stratford upon Avon. We were educated, we laughed, we were shocked and disheartened about what we heard but also provoked and inspired by the discussion, our investigations and our colleagues in the industry we were lucky to work with.

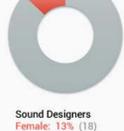
It’s so rare to be able to take time out to think through and act on projects like this. Advance gave us the time and space and encouraged us to think. Through the homework it forced us to dedicate some time to think through the ideas of our alumni scheme but also to undertake in-depth investigation. At the away days we looked at our own question but were inspired to contribute to the other questions; offering insight, knowledge and experiences which we hope informed and benefited their explorations as the fellow Advance members certainly did for us.

Aside from the practical actions we can and should take to support and improve the trajectory of emerging directors, we learned that the RSC should be more transparent about what we do currently and what we’re going to do. We should consult and involve industry colleagues in our work with directors and our planning for the future.

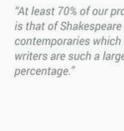
ERICA WHYMAN, DEPUTY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
ZOE DONEGAN, PRODUCER
AND CLAIRE BIRCH, ASSISTANT PRODUCER

Background Statistics

Royal Shakespeare Company
Creative teams and writers on in-house productions and co-productions from 2003 to 2013.



Writers
Female: 11% (17)
Male: 89% (140)



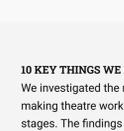
Directors
Female: 27% (40)
Male: 73% (106)



Designers
Female: 45% (74)
Male: 55% (89)



Lighting Designers
Female: 11% (15)
Male: 89% (120)



Sound Designers
Female: 13% (18)
Male: 87% (120)

“At least 70% of our produced work is that of Shakespeare and his (male) contemporaries which is why the writers are such a large male percentage.”

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer’s simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

10 KEY THINGS WE LEARNED

We investigated the numbers behind who is making theatre work in England, and on which stages. The findings were massive and far-reaching...

+ More

5 KEY THINGS OTHER THEATRES CAN DO

Practical suggestions for what other theatres can do to move forward themselves...

+ More



Our Question

"We acknowledge that we have historically employed more male actors than female. In programming a balanced repertoire across the year what factors need to be in place to ensure a gender balance in the employment of actors?"

Profile

Sheffield Theatres is the largest producing theatre complex outside of London...



Starting Point

We scanned our past seasons and considered what the onstage gender balance has looked like in the past. The results were not so edifying...



What We Did

We looked at the gender balance of our audiences and discussed how we might better represent them on stage...



- + What we learned
- + Our new pledge
- + Watch video interview



Crucible Theatre Sheffield. Photo: Paul White Photography.

<p>Founded in</p> <h1>1968</h1>	<p>Artistic Director</p> <h2>Daniel Evans</h2> <p>Since 2009</p>		<h3>Profile</h3> <p>Sheffield Theatres is the largest producing theatre complex outside of London. Across its three theatres: the Crucible, the Lyceum and the Studio, the company produces and presents a diverse programme of work including drama, musicals, dance, comedy, opera, ballet and children's shows.</p> <p>Chief Executive Dan Bates Artistic Director Daniel Evans</p> <p>+ www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk</p>
<p>Company Type</p> <h3>Building based</h3> <p>We tour work and perform in our own building (3 auditoria). Crucible: 950 or 680 seats (depending on configuration) Lyceum: approx 950 Studio: up to 400 (but usually configured for 200)</p>	<p>Public Funding</p> <h2>£1,301,757</h2> <p>Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.</p>	<p>Location</p> <h3>Sheffield</h3>	
<p>Productions</p> <h1>9</h1> <p>Opened in 2013</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>87 Core full-time staff</p> <p>28 Core part-time staff</p> <p>2 Associate roles</p>		

Our Question

We acknowledge that we have historically employed more male actors than female. In programming a balanced repertoire across the year, what factors need to be in place to ensure a gender balance in the employment of actors?

WHAT WE DID

"We are much more aware when we are making programming choices not to be led by our perhaps unconscious, underlying assumptions: that things are a certain way, have been a certain way, and that that is how they will be."

DANIEL EVANS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Our Starting Point

We scanned our past seasons and considered what the onstage gender balance has looked like in the past. The results were not so edifying. We looked at the gender balance of our audiences and discussed how we might better represent them on stage. This led us to focus in on the gender balance between male and female actors, both in terms of number and in terms of range and scope of role. Connecting with the other organisations engaged in Advance and sharing the challenges was invaluable.

The next stage was to create an Action Plan that covered a year's programming and confirmed the necessary steps. This included:

- Agreeing an official and measurable pledge
- Establishing resources required
- Identifying potential barriers
- The need to raise more money for commissioning budget
- Timeline

What We Learnt

The Advance programme encouraged us to look at the division of male and female roles on stage and research proved that the balance needed to be redressed. We learned that although some acting companies included more female characters it didn't necessarily mean that the roles were substantial or drove the narrative. We have also agreed that, in addition to actors on stage, we plan to examine the gender mix of our creative teams and the writers with whom we collaborate and commission.

Our response

Sheffield Theatres' new pledge is:

"To employ an equal number of male and female actors throughout each season and ensure that female roles also have prominence and run against current stereotypes."

As we plan Spring/Summer 2015 and beyond, the balance of gender, on stage and in the stories told, is now part of every programming conversation internally and externally. We are already pleased with the progress we've made as we're about to announce our next season.

Watch the interview with Daniel Evans, Artistic Director, Sheffield Theatres.

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

10 KEY THINGS WE LEARNED

We investigated the numbers behind who is making theatre work in mass, and on which stages. The findings were massive and far-reaching...

+ More

5 KEY THINGS OTHER THEATRES CAN DO

Practical suggestions for what other theatres can do to move forward themselves...

+ More



Our Question

“How can the Tricycle better represent female designers (set, lighting, and sound) in its creative teams? Also, both male and female, what can the Tricycle do to broaden the cultural make-up of its creative teams, now and for the future?”

Profile

The Tricycle views the world through a variety of lenses, bringing unheard voices into the mainstream...



Starting Point

Internal research showed women are underrepresented in design roles in our creative teams...



What We Did

We wanted to better understand this and whether it represents a broader question for the industry...



- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Watch video interview
- + Our response
- + Creative team stats



Founded in
1980

Artistic Director
Indhu Rubasingham
Since 2012



Profile

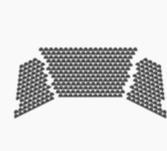
The Tricycle views the world through a variety of lenses, bringing unheard voices into the mainstream. It presents high quality and innovative work, which provokes debate and emotionally engages. Located in Brent, the most diverse borough in London, the Tricycle is a local venue with an international vision.

Open seven days a week, the Tricycle offers a unique 235 seat theatre, an independent 300 seat cinema, vibrant bar and café, plus three rehearsal spaces that are used for our community and education work, Tricycle shows, or hires.

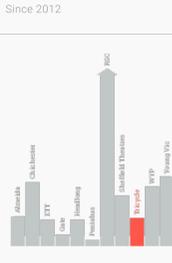
Converted from a music and dance hall, the Tricycle opened in 1980. Today, the Tricycle Theatre continues its reputation for presenting the highest quality British and international work, reflecting the exceptional diversity of its local community.

We tell big stories from all over the world. The Tricycle champions unheard voices and stories which offer an unexpected viewpoint, or come from the margins. We aim to diversify the canon of work on British stages through scale of opportunity, commitment to talent and by telling human stories without borders.

+ www.tricycle.co.uk



Company Type
Building based
One auditorium, 235 capacity



Public Funding
£741,997
Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.



Location
Kilburn, Brent

Productions
6
Opened in 2013 (plus 2 received shows)

Staff
26 Core full-time staff



2 Core part-time staff



5 Associate roles



Our Question

How can the Tricycle better represent female designers (set, lighting, and sound) in its creative teams? Also, both male and female, what can the Tricycle do to broaden the cultural make-up of its creative teams, now and for the future?

We discovered a disparity between the diversity of our acting companies, writers and directors and the diversity of our creative teams. Without disregarding the creative talent we are already privileged to work with, we wanted to better understand this and whether it represents a broader question for the industry.

WHAT WE DID

“We did some number crunching, and it became clear that for us as an organisation there was some disparity between some roles. We tried to look at the areas where we had the least representation. We wanted to start asking questions about why that was, what it means, and how we might address imbalances.”

NIC WASS, ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE

Investigation

Internal research and the Gate/Tonic group's statistics showed women are underrepresented in design roles in creative teams. We want the Tricycle's creative teams to have as broad a cultural make-up as is evidenced by our actors, writers and directors. In Indhu Rubasingham's inaugural Tricycle seasons, 89% of directors were female (please note, our Artistic Director is female), writers 45%, actors 43%, whereas the design roles were 9% for set and lighting and 35% for sound. In 2014/15 to date, these statistics have altered: female directors make up 70%, writers 64%, actors 55%, with set and lighting designers at 10% and sound designers at 70%. We have a female Artistic Director and a male Resident Director, which is taken into account.

Our focus is now upon female representation amongst set and lighting designers. Tonic have helped facilitate conversations with the Gate Theatre, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Clean Break and the Association of Lighting Designers, to name a few. Lighting Design will be our first area due to this connection.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

- We would like to work with other theatres/companies to improve training, mentoring and access from underrepresented groups, and share resources.
- Annual day of introductory meetings between designers and our artistic team.
- Continue to monitor gender representation across our creative teams/programming.
- Host workshops, including Lighting Design workshop during our 2015 Tricycle Takeover which will include prominent female role models.
- Continue to be alert to – and introduce – talent from underrepresented groups.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

Yes, we want to encourage a greater diversity amongst creative teams within the Tricycle, highlight role models and contribute to broader change within the industry.

Watch the interview with Nic Wass, Artistic Associate, Tricycle Theatre.

“Working with the group was invaluable. Every theatre chose one area to focus on, but it quickly became clear that many difficulties were shared. It was helpful to hear how others were tackling questions of equality, share knowledge, resources and advice. Most importantly, it was great to look constructively at how we can work together to make things better.”

NIC WASS, ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE

Background Statistics

Tricycle Theatre
Creative teams and writers on in-house productions and co-productions from 2005 to 2013.



Writers
Female: 31% (39)
Male: 69% (85)



Directors
Female: 45% (43)
Male: 55% (53)



Designers
Female: 60% (40)
Male: 40% (27)



Lighting Designers
Female: 15% (9)
Male: 85% (50)



Sound Designers
Female: 14% (8)
Male: 86% (48)

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

10 KEY THINGS WE LEARNED

We investigated the numbers behind who is making theatre work in England, and on which stages. The findings were massive and far-reaching...

+ More

5 KEY THINGS OTHER THEATRES CAN DO

Practical suggestions for what other theatres can do to move forward themselves...

+ More

ALMEIDA
THEATRECHICHESTER
FESTIVAL
THEATREENGLISH
TOURING
THEATREGATE
THEATRE

HEADLONG

PENTABUS

ROYAL
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANYSHEFFIELD
THEATRESTRICYCLE
THEATREWEST
YORKSHIRE
PLAYHOUSEYOUNG
VIC

Our Question

"What do we mean when talk about female-centred stories and what are the ways in which we can get more of them on our stages?"

Profile

West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds is one of the UK's leading producing theatres. We are a cultural hub, a place where people gather to tell and share stories and to engage in world class theatre...



Starting Point

We wanted to ask this question because it provokes a whole series of further questions which we wanted to interrogate properly...



What We Did

We have an action plan in place for the delivery of new work by female writers and/or about female protagonists and intend to implement this over the next three years...



- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Watch video interview
- + Our response

Profile Our question What we did What we learned Video interview

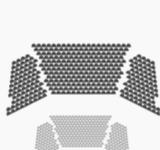


Beryl by Maxine Peake. Photo: Keith Pattison

Founded in

1964

Leeds Playhouse was founded in 1964. It moved to the Quarry Hill site and became West Yorkshire Playhouse in 1990.



Company Type

Building based

2 auditoriums:
Quarry: 750 seats
Courtyard: 350 seats
We also present work in our studio and other areas on-site.

Artistic Director

James Brining

Since 2012

WY PLAY
HOUSE

Profile

West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds is one of the UK's leading producing theatres. We are a cultural hub, a place where people gather to tell and share stories and to engage in world class theatre. We make work which is pioneering and relevant, seeking out the best companies and artists to create inspirational theatre in the heart of Yorkshire. From large scale spectacle, to intimate performance we develop and make work for our stages, for found spaces, for touring, for schools and community centres. We create work to entertain and inspire.

As dedicated collaborators, we work regularly with other theatres from across the UK, independent producers, and some of the most distinctive, original voices in theatre today. We develop work with established practitioners and find, nurture and support new voices that ought to be heard. We cultivate new talent by providing creative space for new writers, emerging directors, companies and individual theatre makers to refine their practice.

Alongside our work for the stage we are dedicated to providing creative engagement opportunities that excite and stimulate. We build, run and sustain projects which reach out to everyone from refugee communities, to young people and students, to older communities and people with learning difficulties. At the Playhouse there is always a way to get involved.

West Yorkshire Playhouse – Vital theatre.

+ www.wyp.org.uk



Location

Leeds,
West Yorkshire

Public Funding

£1,533,901

Arts Council England subsidy for the 2013/14 financial year.

Our Question

What do we mean when talk about female-centred stories and what are the ways in which we can get more of them on our stages?

We wanted to ask this because it provokes a whole series of further questions which we wanted to interrogate properly. Like what do we mean by a female-centred story? Or, at least, what kinds of female-centred stories are full of clichés and how, when engaging writers to work with these kinds of stories, can we ourselves avoid allowing clichéd representations of women's experiences to creep back in, even when we're trying not to. Looking at story form and genre became a key part of spotting those traps.

It also enabled us to refine a possible model of producing new plays for WYP. We don't have a small studio which would enable consistent high-risk programming of new work. The Courtyard is 350 seats so the risk on a new play is greater. So our question enabled us to think about developing this work more collaboratively and explore ways of giving a riskier new play a chance to perform well at box office.

WHAT WE DID

"As a man, there is a slight apprehensiveness about talking about these issues, a feeling perhaps that you are part of the problem, but for me this was also Advance's greatest value. It's really important that men are in these conversations as much as possible, otherwise it can feel equally excluding and difficult to contribute, to tune in and contribute to progress."

MARK ROSENBLATT,
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Investigation

Tonic really helped us answer some of these subsidiary questions and also pushed us to commit the ideas to an action plan which produced some helpful timelines and real frameworks for moving forward.

We also found that, simply by exploring our question in the context of other organisations' questions, that opportunities to partner and co-produce with our colleagues started to emerge.

What Did We Learn?

That female-centred stories mean female characters driving narrative, and that narrative, and who's driving it, is a powerful, political choice. That the kinds of stories you tell can change the gender balance of the teams telling them, let alone the audiences watching them. That, in effect, story can significantly influence the gender-balance of the workforce in our sector. And that, if we are focused in how we commission and develop, these kinds of stories can also make sense at box-office.

In practice, Advance has helped focus our recruitment processes for creative teams as it is imperative that we improve the gender imbalances in our own figures. We now work harder to identify and recruit outstanding female directors, designers and writers. We also have an action plan in place for the delivery of new work by female writers and/or about female protagonists and intend to implement this over the next three years.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

We want to get commissioning and continue to keep these ideas at the centre of our focus. To hand over this learning to new team members as part of our induction processes and programming criteria.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

Yes, to create confidence across our theatre in the value and importance of this work.



Watch the interview with Mark Rosenblatt, Associate Director at West Yorkshire Playhouse.

I was not the only WYP team member to attend Advance away days, but I enjoyed working with the other group members at the Royal Exchange and the NT Studio, and it was illuminating to hear where others stood on a single focused issue. I really enjoyed the sessions as an opportunity for consciousness-raising and for scrutinising one's current raft of work, practice and processes through a very specific lens. As a man, there is a slight apprehensiveness about talking about these issues, a feeling perhaps that you are part of the problem, but for me this was also Advance's greatest value. It's really important that men are in these conversations as much as possible, otherwise it can feel equally excluding and difficult to contribute, to tune in and contribute to progress. I also found it enormously creatively stimulating and it reminded me again and again how much talent remains untapped and invisible and how many untold stories there are out there waiting to be explored and given their own form. The session proved a very concrete tool for us to use in our own work and it was useful to be inspired by standard practice in another country. Guest speaker Moira Buffini's insights will stay with me, especially given how closely they touched upon our question.

MARK ROSENBLATT, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

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Practical suggestions for what other theatres can do to move forward themselves...

+ More

ADVANCE 2016



In 2016 Advance tasked nine leading performing arts companies from across England to proactively explore how they could achieve greater gender equality across their work.

[What We Did](#) | [Why](#) | [The Process](#) | [Who Was Involved](#) | [Insights](#) | [Reflections](#) | [See the Work](#)

ADVANCE 2016 – WHAT WE DID

Between January and June 2016 Tonic worked with a second Advance cohort. Having completed a pilot in 2014 there were some key pieces of learning we could act on when devising the 2016 programme.

The [pilot](#) taught us that the methodical approach of Advance really worked for the organisations and that they were able to benefit from the combination of quantitative and qualitative information that the programme delivered. We knew they found the [Away Days](#) to be a valuable opportunity to come together as a group and to have some designated time in their busy schedules to focus on gender equality. They told us that doing the process over a six-month time period felt just about right; it was long enough to explore an aspect of gender imbalance in detail but not so much so that it dropped off their radars or lost momentum. They liked being set deadlines and being required to deliver action plans by the end of the process – while achieving these things weren't without challenges it forced them to focus on action and practical solutions rather than getting stuck just talking about the problem.

The pilot confirmed for us the value of having organisations of all different shapes and sizes in the room together. Across both cohorts we purposefully sought to bring on board a range of organisations which, between them, have a national reach, are a mixture of building-based and touring, and which hold distinct positions in the performing arts ecology.

The organisations vary from very small ([Mahogany Opera Group](#) has just seven members of staff) up to big national institutions (the [Royal Opera House](#) has over 1000). That's because the pilot demonstrated how organisations of varying scales can – between them – affect change in different ways. Small organisations can be agile and quick in their decision making so can be at the front of the curve in regards to driving change, even though they may be limited in their resources. Large organisations may take longer to agree on and implement change, but when they do, have the resources and industry profile whereby they can instigate seismic shifts.

Having different types of staff involved in the programme was important too. There was unanimous buy in from the top, and each organisation's work on Advance was led by its Artistic Directors, Executive Directors or equivalents. But they worked in collaboration with a range of staff from within their organisations including personnel involved in areas like producing, communications, human resources, and education, as well as their associate artists and those whose focus is on the development of artists and new work. This meant that, between them, the people who made up the cohort brought a plethora of skills and perspectives to the question of how to reduce gender imbalances in the performing arts.

Advance was originally conceived as a programme for theatres, but while running the pilot we realised it needn't be a theatre-specific project; it would be equally beneficial in other areas of the arts and creative industries. With the [2016 cohort](#) we began this process of broadening Advance out by working with dance and opera companies.

Looking ahead, we're excited too to recognise that Advance provides a toolkit that could catalyse change in many different areas. While it was conceived to address gender equality it is not applicable to gender alone and in the future we are keen to explore the wide and various applications it could have.

- [+ Who was involved?](#)
- [+ See what each of the organisations did](#)
- [+ Insights and common themes](#)

While progress is being made, there remains a way to go before we achieve gender equality in the performing arts.

Steven McRae, Alexander Campbell, Geri Lewis & Artists of The Royal Ballet in Romeo and Juliet. ©RCH, 2015. Photographed by Alice Pennefather

What We Did

Why

The Process

Who Was Involved

Insights

Reflections

See the Work

WHY DO THIS WORK?

Tonic first ran Advance in 2014. You can read why the programme was created [here](#). Following the success of the 2014 programme, several dance, opera, and theatre organisations expressed a desire to participate in the process too. There was clear scope for the work to continue.

In this video, Tonic's Director Lucy Kerbel discusses how the work conducted by the 2016 cohort built on that done in the 2014 pilot with [Royal Central School of Speech and Drama's Prof. Gilli Bush-Bailey](#).

- + [Who was involved?](#)
- + [See what each of the organisations did](#)
- + [Insights and themes](#)

ADVANCE

The aspiration for gender equality - not just desirable, entirely possible.

Advance works with England's leading performing arts companies, transforming their aspiration for gender equality into reality. Led by Tonic Theatre, we are removing barriers to female talent both on-stage and off.

Search

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A TONIC PROJECT



ACADEMIC PARTNER

ROYAL CENTRAL
SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

2016 PROGRAMME FUNDED BY



2014 PROGRAMME FUNDED BY





Rather than advocating quick fixes, Advance focuses on understanding the root causes behind the comparative lack of women in key areas of the performing arts.

Mahogany Opera Group's Brundibar. Photo: Belinda Lawley.

[What We Did](#) [Why](#) [The Process](#) [Who Was Involved](#) [Insights](#) [Reflections](#) [See the Work](#)

THE PROCESS

The second cycle of Advance ran from January to June 2016. It tasked nine leading dance, opera, and theatre organisations from around England to proactively explore how they could achieve greater gender equality in their work and throughout their workforces.

Before beginning, each organisation was asked to write a question they wanted to explore over the duration of the programme. This was to give each organisation a targeted and focused starting point for their investigation and, following that, a way of helping them stay on track over the subsequent six months. After deciding on their question, Tonic worked with each organisation to help them break it down into manageable chunks, and to plan and carry out their approach to answering it.

[+ Read the questions](#)

Step One – Investigation

This step centred on the area of focus the organisations selected for themselves via their question. Tonic conducted investigations on their behalves, examining how things are currently working, and sought to understand where barriers to women exist. Tonic then shared their findings with the organisations.

This step was about the organisations enhancing their own understanding and asking 'why'; it was about them questioning their own thinking and that of others, and about exposing themselves to perspectives and information that may previously have been off their radar. Over all, it was about them being reflective and listening to others, not about them leading or needing to come up with solutions; that would come in Step Two.

Step Two – Innovation

Based on the findings of the investigation, the organisations explored and considered alternative or supplementary ways of working which would go some way towards removing the barriers they had identified.

This step was about dreaming up new ways of doing things, and of challenging existing preconceptions and the 'but we've always done it this way' approach. At the same time, any new approaches had to be achievable, realistic, and deliverable within the organisations' already busy schedules and programmes of work.

Step Three – Action Plans

By the conclusion of Innovation, the organisations had identified a range of new actions they would like to implement and each produced an action plan outlining steps towards making this happen. These action plans covered a range of approaches. Some were:

- small and time-limited, others were big and long-lasting.
- designed to achieve impact in one organisation, others to drive change across the wider industry.
- focused on the operational or 'nuts and bolts' side of how the organisation runs, others focused on artistic output or the creation of new artistic works.

[+ See what each of the organisations did](#)

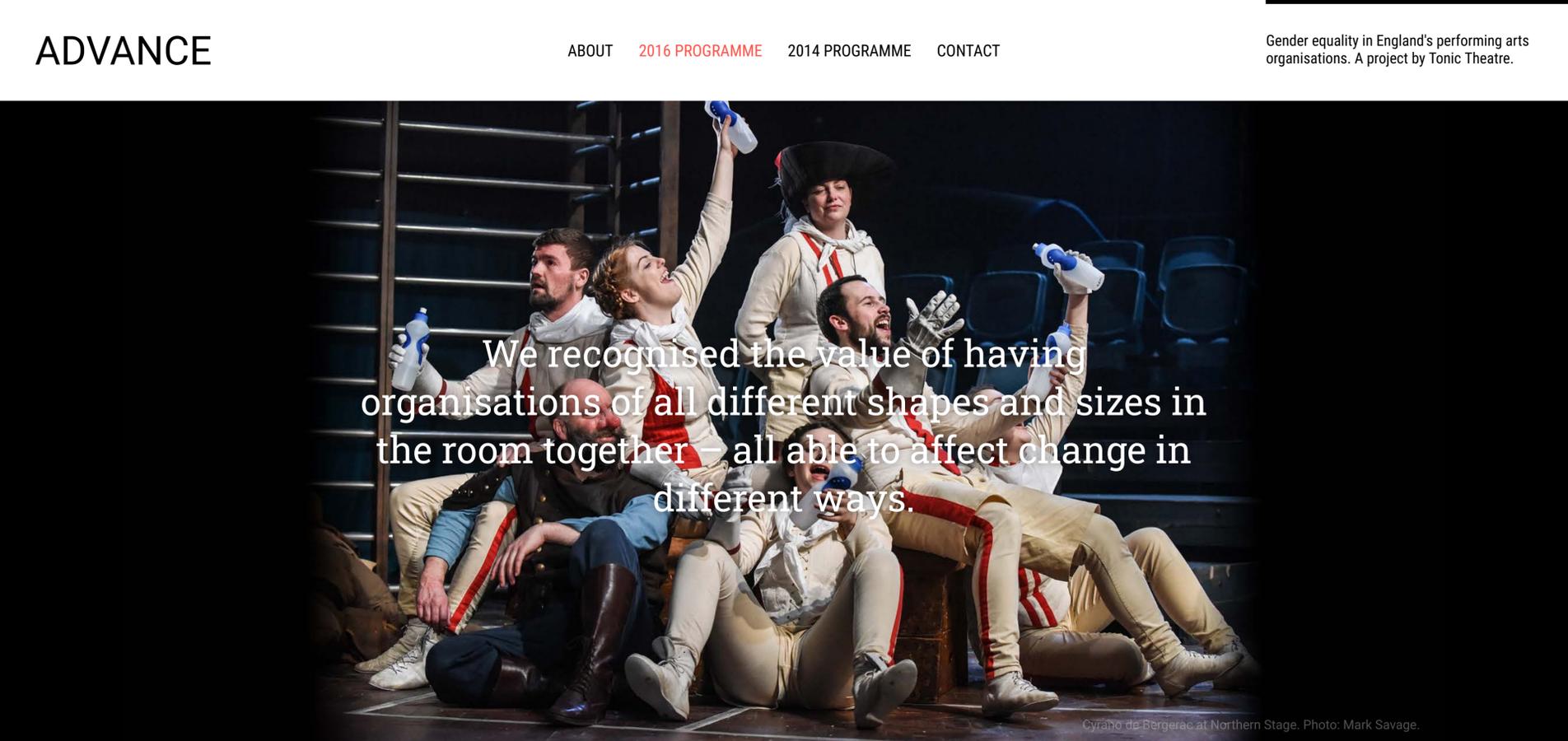
AWAY DAYS

Although every organisation was pursuing its own question, their findings were of course of interest to one another, and they were encouraged throughout to share their learning, provide provocation to one another, and look for opportunities to create future collaborations.

To facilitate this, Tonic led four Away Days over the course of the programme. These brought the lead members of staff from the participating organisations together in a focused environment and away from their desks, emails and to-do lists. Away Days 1 and 2 were hosted by the National Theatre Studio in London, Away Day 3 by Cast in Doncaster and Away Day 4 by Northern Ballet in Leeds. The Away Days:

- Were an opportunity for the organisations to come together to talk, share progress, make requests of one another, and feel like peers taking part in a collective journey.
- Participate in joined-up conversations, facilitated by Tonic over matters besides their individual areas of focus but relevant to how broader change could be achieved across the industry.
- Spend time with members of the 2014 cohort and hear from guest speakers.

Watch the videos below to hear Emily McLaughlin and Sarah Murray from the [National Theatre](#), and Alison Porter and Michael Duffy from [Mahogany Opera Group](#) on taking part in the Away Days.



We recognised the value of having organisations of all different shapes and sizes in the room together – all able to affect change in different ways.

Cyrano de Bergerac at Northern Stage. Photo: Mark Savage.

[Advance 2016](#) | [Who Was Involved](#) | [Tonic](#) | [Central](#) | [See the Work](#)

WHO WAS INVOLVED

In 2016 Tonic's Advance programme tasked nine leading performing arts companies from across England to proactively explore how they could achieve greater gender equality on their stages.

Advance's [2014](#) pilot confirmed for us the value of having organisations of all different shapes and sizes in the room together. Across both cohorts we purposefully sought to bring on board a range of organisations which, between them, have a national reach, are a mixture of building-based and touring, and which hold distinct positions in the performing arts ecology. The organisations vary from tiny up to big national institutions. That's because the pilot demonstrated how organisations of varying scales can – between them – affect change in different ways.

- [Cast](#)
- [Clean Break](#)
- [Mahogany Opera Group](#)
- [National Theatre](#)
- [New Wolsey Theatre](#)
- [Northern Ballet](#)
- [Northern Stage](#)
- [Royal Opera House](#)
- [Sadler's Wells](#)

+ [See what each of the organisations did](#)

TONIC'S ROLE

Advance 2016 has been co-led by the Director of Tonic, Lucy Kerbel and Tonic's Advance Associate Vicky Long, a freelance consultant and producer. Tonic was on hand to the participating organisations throughout. The biggest threat to the success of Advance was the extreme workload of all the organisations, and the danger that amidst the manifold time and capacity pressures already placed on them and their staff, Advance would get lost. Consequently, Tonic provided much of the legwork that enabled them to effectively conduct their research. This broke down into a host of activities that included:

- Accessing materials on the organisations' behalf.
- Acquiring information that would fill specific gaps in their existing knowledge.
- Connecting the organisations with individuals and groups (inside and outside the performing arts industry) that could help them in their investigations.
- Facilitating sessions between various staff and departments within the organisations.
- Conducting qualitative research e.g. running focus groups and conducting interviews.
- Conducting quantitative research e.g. statistical analysis and data capturing.
- Offering provocation, advice and guidance.
- Being a sounding board.

+ [About Tonic](#)

+ [Tonic reflects on Advance 2016](#)

+ [Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long on the subject of change](#)

CENTRAL'S ROLE

In 2016 the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama's research team continued their collaborative partnership with Tonic Theatre, building on the research established with Advance in 2014. With additional funding from [Research@Central](#), Gilli Bush-Bailey (Professor of Women's Performance Histories) and Dr Katharine Low (Lecturer in Community Performance and Applied Theatre) welcomed a new member to the team; Research Associate, Dr Lisa Woynarski.

+ [Central's role in Advance 2016](#)

+ [Lisa Woynarski's article "What do we mean by gender?"](#)

+ [Lisa Woynarski's article "What is Intersectionality?"](#)

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2016 PROGRAMME FUNDED BY



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

2014 PROGRAMME FUNDED BY

phf Paul Hamlyn
Foundation

Research is a series of discoveries about what is there, but also what is missing or simply forgotten.

Image courtesy of Mahogany Opera Group

[Advance 2016](#) | [Central](#) | [What do we mean by gender?](#) | [What is Intersectionality?](#)

ABOUT CENTRAL

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama is recognised as 'world leading' both for its arts research and as a provider of professional training for the creative industries. As a college of the University of London since 2005, Central realised the ambitions of its visionary founder, Elsie Fogerty, a specialist in speech training who believed firmly in the social value of theatre, and advancing the study of theatre as an academic discipline.

Over a century later, Central now boasts a wide range of professional training with undergraduate and postgraduate courses in creative producing, scenography, theatre lighting design, theatre sound, prop making, scenic construction and scenic art which stand alongside the renowned range of acting courses and leading courses in applied and community performance practices.

The industry-connectedness of Central's teaching is enhanced by research-active staff who engage with and support arts research, publishing across a wide range of subject areas. Central is, perhaps uniquely, in a position to recognise and bridge the gap between the aspirations of the 'real' world of the theatre industries and the potential insights from the real world of academic research.

Read more about what we do at
+ www.cssd.ac.uk/research

THE ROYAL CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA

An introduction to Central's role in Advance 2016, from Gilli Bush-Bailey, Professor of Women's Performance Histories.

"Our partnership with Advance cohorts in [2014](#) and [2016](#) is a dynamic research model that situates research in the context of a continuum: a process that will continue to pose questions, stimulate enquiry, and fuel projects that directly engage with the many reasons that gender equality is still a live issue in our creative industries."

In 2016 Central's research team continued their collaborative partnership with [Tonic Theatre](#) as we embarked upon the [second phase](#) of Advance. With additional funding from [Research@Central](#), Gilli Bush-Bailey (Professor of Women's Performance Histories) and Dr Katharine Low (Lecturer in Community Performance and Applied Theatre) welcomed a new member to the team; Research Associate, Dr Lisa Woynarski. Building on the research established with Advance in [2014](#) we entered the [2016](#) dynamic research phase with the second cohort of participating companies, now expanded to include opera and dance companies. There were new challenges and new opportunities to extend our focus on key areas of the research which we might begin to frame in terms of Contexts and Conversations for exploring

- (hi)stories we have and what different stories we want to make for the future
- findings from 'forgotten' initiatives and how to keep research alive and present
- acknowledging the way [gender](#) fits into a larger context of overlapping inequalities through an [intersectional](#) approach
- connections with other equality and diversity initiatives
- establishing and sharing models and processes
- seeking networks for sustainability and legacies of change
- exploring academic and cultural [discourses on gender](#), performing arts and social structures
- understanding the role training plays in expectations, representation and industry leadership

In 2014 Central was delighted to host the launch of the Advance website in our Embassy Theatre. We spoke then about the process of [our research](#) as engaging with a series of discoveries about what is there, but also interrogating what is missing or simply forgotten about gender equality. That work of searching, sifting, excavating and sharing with industry and academic partners continues and reaches out in many ways – including this second Advance website.

You can see more about the Central Research team in the following video and get a taste of an early workshop led by Katharine Low from which we will be developing more models for thinking and working with equality agendas with the next generation of industry professionals.

+ [Read Lisa Woynarski's article "What do we mean by gender?"](#)

+ [Read Lisa Woynarski's article "What is Intersectionality?"](#)

Advance has been focused on gender equality but we understand these issues do not exist in isolation and are part of a wider understanding of diversity and equality.

Joanna by Deborah Brock, Laura Lomas, Chino Odimba and Ushula Rani Sarma (2015_16). Photo: Katherine Leedale

Advance 2016 | Central | What do we mean by gender? | What is Intersectionality?

ABOUT CENTRAL

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama is recognised as 'world leading' both for its arts research and as a provider of professional training for the creative industries. In 2016 Central's research team continued their collaborative partnership with Tonic Theatre and embarked upon the second phase of Advance, building on the research established with Advance in 2014. [Read more about Central's role in Advance 2016.](#)

[+ More info](#)

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

By Dr Lisa Woynarski, Advance Research Associate, Central's Research Team

Advance is a project that has been focused on gender equality but we understand these issues do not exist in isolation and are part of a wider understanding of diversity and equality.

Inevitably we began conversations with organisations that considered other identity markers, oppressions and inequalities, including Deaf and disabled people, BAME people, transgender people and class divisions. An intersectional approach takes into account these differences.

Intersectionality is the idea that forms of inequalities overlap and are interrelated at both a personal and structural level (i.e. racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, Islamophobia, etc.).

These 'isms' and discriminations do not exist in isolation. This means that addressing sexism or working towards equality requires acknowledging the different forms of oppression faced by people and how they intersect to create varied experiences.

Law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' in the 1980's as a way of addressing the separation of race and gender in anti-discrimination law in the US (which protected people against discrimination either based on race or gender, but not the overlap of both). She was building on a long history of black feminist work that insisted that differences among women needed to be taken into account when working towards gender equality. For example, the inequalities faced by women of colour are different than the inequalities faced by white women. Since the 1980's intersectionality has expanded to include multiple forms of identities and oppressions.

Taking an intersectional approach to gender equality in the UK performing arts means acknowledging the different experiences of privilege, access, opportunity, power and tradition.

To take a simplistic example, a middle-class, able-bodied white woman who grew up exposed to the performing arts may be able to access and navigate the industry more successfully due to relationships, education, experience, bias and the way they communicate, compared to a working-class woman of colour (or a disabled women) who did not necessarily grow up experiencing the performing arts. If you consider:

- sexual orientation
- gender identity
- class
- religion
- ethnicity
- disability status

a complex set of structures around access and opportunity begins to emerge. This means that equality cannot be achieved through single actions, rather it requires multi-faceted changes on multiple levels. During the Advance process, organisations considered how gender equality fit into a wider picture of diversity in the industry and were able to learn from successes in work with disabled artists, BAME artists and working with people from a variety of class backgrounds.

Lisa Woynarski
Advance Research Associate

[+ Read Lisa Woynarski's article "What do we mean by gender?"](#)
[+ Read about Central's role in Advance 2016](#)

Advance is about supporting the UK performing arts sector in achieving gender equality. But what do we mean by gender?

Lisa Dillon in *The Roaming Girl*, Royal Shakespeare Company. Photo: Helen Maybanks.

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY GENDER?

By Dr Lisa Woynarski, Advance Research Associate, Central's Research Team

Advance is about supporting the UK performing arts sector in achieving gender equality. But what do we mean by gender? Although this may seem like a straightforward question with a relatively simple answer, there is a long history of trying to understand what gender is and how we express it and interact with it.

'Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.'

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 33

Judith Butler, a prominent gender theorist, writes about gender as a performance in *Gender Trouble*. Gender is different to sex, and is not essential or biologically innate. Gender is reproduced through the repetition of performative acts and codes at both an unconscious and conscious level. These acts are normalised and therefore can appear 'natural' but are actually culturally learned from the time a baby is born. They form the stereotypical qualities often associated with particular gender roles.

- Gender is the social construction of identity often assumed to be based on biological sex and tends to exaggerate biological differences. However, gender and biological sex are not necessarily linked. Gender is often designated as man/women but also includes a whole spectrum from gender non-conforming to gender queer to transgender and more.
- Sex is often a biological categorisation assigned at birth based on reproductive potential and is frequently designated as male or female.
- So-called masculine or feminine qualities are not innate or dependent on biological sex. I.e. people assigned the biological sex 'male' at birth, does not necessarily mean they will exhibit masculine qualities.
- Gender then is not what you are or what you have, but rather what you do – or how you perform – at different times and in different contexts.

"Everyone performs or expresses gender in some way... These ideas of gender inform Advance and open up a space for the possibility of change."

Everyone performs or expresses gender in some way – whether they perform 'traditional' gender roles or not – so the question becomes what form that performance will take (not whether or not to do it). Butler writes that a person can choose their own gender identity because gender is constructed through performative acts. Gender is contextual, fluid and variable. Rather than linking biological sex to gendered bodies, which is then often linked to sexual desire, gender becomes flexible.

- Gender is a spectrum rather than a binary (man/woman).
- For example, transgender people perform or express a gender identity different than the one associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- Cisgender people perform or identify with the same gender they were assigned at birth.
- There are also people who identify and express themselves as non-gender (no gender), non-binary (not man or woman), gender neutral, gender queer or gender non-conforming.
- This spectrum of gender is known as gender-expansive and is also fluid as people seek out identities, gender performances and roles that represent their individualities and that are not socially constructed in 'traditional' or binary ways.
- Gender-expansive people often face different forms of discrimination or inequalities than cisgender people.

These ideas of gender inform Advance and open up a space for the possibility of change. Thinking of the performance of gender means there is room to adapt, subvert and reject gender differences we have been socialised to adhere to. This may be one way of addressing the material inequalities based on gender and the reductive stereotypes associated with all genders. A statement like 'women express their emotions more freely than men' is not a statement about an essential quality innate to women, it is a generalisation about the way women and men have been socialised and have learned different behaviours, often on an unconscious level. When we refer to gender equality in the Advance context, we mean the ability to access careers and opportunities free from discrimination, oppression or bias (unconscious or not) based on gender identity or expression.

Lisa Woynarski

Advance Research Associate

References:

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble*, New York, Routledge.

[+ Read Lisa Woynarski's article "What is Intersectionality?"](#)

[+ Read about Central's role in Advance 2016](#)

ABOUT CENTRAL

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama is recognised as 'world leading' both for its arts research and as a provider of professional training for the creative industries. In 2016 Central's research team continued their collaborative partnership with Tonic Theatre and embarked upon the second phase of Advance, building on the research established with Advance in 2014. [Read more about Central's role in Advance 2016.](#)

[+ More info](#)

While each organisation selected a different line of enquiry to pursue, common themes and concerns emerged.

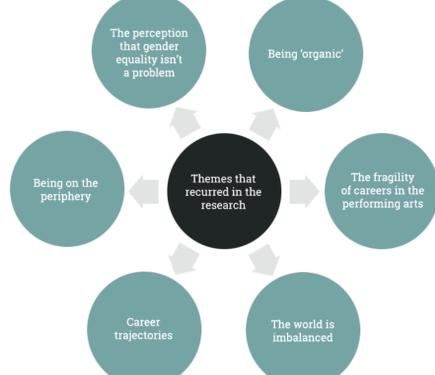
1984, Northern Ballet. Photo: Emma Kauldhar.

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INSIGHTS

While each Advance 2016 organisation selected a different line of enquiry to pursue, what emerged were certain key themes.

A central part of the Advance 2016 [process](#) was research conducted by Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long, and Royal Central School of Speech and Drama Post Doctoral Researcher, Dr. Lisa Woyrnarski. Just over 200 people who are involved in dance, opera and theatre in England and beyond took part in the research through focus groups, workshops, and depth interviews. A further 220 completed an online survey or made written submissions. While each organisation selected a different line of enquiry to pursue, what emerged were certain key themes. Tonic's Lucy Kerbel outlines them below.



6 THEMES THAT RECURRED IN THE RESEARCH

The perception that gender equality isn't a problem

A perception exists that gender equality isn't a problem in the performing arts. For some time now in the arts we've been used to having conversations about diversity based on figures (and in particular, the lack of people represented from certain groups) but gender equality is different. There is a very healthy number of women working in (as well as studying, participating in, and attending) dance, opera, and theatre. However, this volume of women can mask profound imbalances that exist in terms of what areas of the workforce women are likely to be concentrated in, what scale of resourcing and profile their work receives, and the level of seniority they may rise to.

We heard from women involved in the research that being the ones to point this out to colleagues who don't perceive there is a problem can put them in a difficult position in the workplace or the rehearsal room. Additionally for women with diverse characteristics, a lack of understanding among their peers that they are simultaneously navigating gender inequalities and the challenges of being part of an underrepresented group (for example, not just being a person of colour working in the arts, or a woman working in the arts, but being a woman of colour working in the arts) can combine to form a set of barriers, the complexity of which are not always acknowledged or understood.

Being 'organic'

The performing arts tends to favour an 'organic' way of working, especially in relation to the making of artistic works and the employment of creatives. Certain protocols, structures, and procedures that are in place for employing and providing working conditions for people in most other industries (and even, to a certain extent, in the administrative side of the performing arts) aren't necessarily there. Instead there tends to be a less structured approach ("whose work have we seen recently?" "Who are people saying is 'hot'?" "Who's on our radar?") based on a perception that when it comes to creatives, talent will inevitably make itself known.

The research findings suggest however that this lack of structure – however well-intentioned or benignly-motivated it may be – is in part responsible for the pronounced imbalances that exist in terms of who is employed in creative roles, and at what scale. While the theory may be that operating free of conventional employment practices gives organisations/employers an unclouded vista from which they can identify the most exciting talent, in reality it is those people who are best adapted to thrive in this unstructured environment that will be the most visible; talent may be a secondary factor. So while employment practices used in other industries may not be directly applicable to the employment of creatives, devising and implementing structures which enable organisations to a) select creatives based on ability, not just visibility and b) monitor whether they are genuinely catering to their needs once they are in the workplace, is an important part of the equation when addressing imbalances between men and women in creative areas.

Being on the periphery

Traditionally women are less likely to be found at the centre of a power base, both within the performing arts and beyond. Today we still find a larger percentage of women than men working on the periphery. This may be driven by a desire to innovate and to be free from the constraints of an establishment that was originally largely built by men in response to the interests and needs of men. Women also have a rich history of working on the fringes to pioneer the new. But whether out of choice or out of necessity, to operate on the periphery can, we heard during the research, be exhausting. It can be financially exhausting because resources and funding tend to be scattered the further away from the epicentre of a power base an artist or company is situated. It can be emotionally wearying because being reliant on the patronage of those inside the powerbase, no matter how warm the relationship, can feel disempowering and infantilising. It can be limiting and frustrating because being situated in the powerbase opens doors and without these credentials it can be difficult to initiate certain dialogues within the industry let alone get into the room for others. The overall result can be a feeling of being locked out and undervalued. This, teamed with often quite extreme and perpetual financial instability and a lack of opportunities to grow, can make an existence on the periphery in the performing arts – whether a location of choice or not – one that demands great resilience.

The fragility of careers in the performing arts

Something the research underlined for us was how fragile careers in the performing arts are, and especially those of people in creative and/or freelance roles. To use an analogy: if a career were a piece of rope suspended between two points, in many industries that rope would be relatively thick and strong. That's because it is made up of lots of individual strands that give it that strength, for instance, there may be a strand in place due to sick pay being there for someone to fall back on; another because there is the security of a permanent contract; another because the pay is consistently of a level that enables a person to cover their monthly outgoings. However the piece of rope representing the career of a creative working in the performing arts may be significantly less sturdy. That's because many of the strands, such as those listed above, are unlikely to be in place (so it may instead resemble a frayed piece of rope, held together in just a few places). And if the rope becomes more depleted – through the loss of further strands – a great strain may be placed on those that remain because proportionally there are fewer of them. It won't take the loss of too many more before a person may find their career is untenable; this is nothing to do with their talent or their commitment, just the circumstances in which they find themselves operating.

While this is the case for all but the most privileged creatives, the research suggested that women's careers are particularly likely to be characterised by severed strands. Earning on average less than male counterparts, being more likely to be programmed on smaller and lower profile stages, more regularly encountering the biases that employers, critics, and colleagues may consciously or unconsciously hold against them and their work, taking time off for caring responsibilities and pregnancy – these are just some of the factors that may compromise the integrity of a woman creative's career. Facing any number of these in combination (and it's worth remembering that some women will face far more than others) may be enough that a creative will feel her career isn't something she can, or wants to, continue with. At this point she may move into an associated field or role, one that provides her with a sturdier rope. She may remain lodged at a certain level of experience, feeling the base she's operating on isn't robust enough from which to take the leaps and risks often necessary to move to the next level. Or she may simply walk away from the performing arts.

Career trajectories

We heard that there is an anticipation in the performing arts that a person's career trajectory, or at least what is often considered a 'successful' career trajectory, is one that looks like an arrow ascending in a smooth upward arc, as a person advances through increasing levels of profile, resource, scale of work and responsibility. It was noted that the performing arts are very good at supporting younger people at the outset of this journey, often seeing emerging artist schemes, entry-level initiatives and apprenticeships like rocket fuel, giving someone an initial boost to get them air-bound and trusting that, if they're good enough, their ability and commitment will provide the momentum for them to maintain this trajectory.

While some of the women involved in the research felt this was absolutely the shape their careers were taking, others did not. We found women wanting to take career gaps, shift between artforms, work in a range of ways and at a variety of scales simultaneously, rather than in a linear or exclusive manner. Some women wanted to, or only had the opportunity to, push forward later in life, feeling their personal maturity and self-assurance strengthened their work, but facing the obstacle of developmental support being concentrated on the young. Many spoke about a desire to work in collaboration or to even absent themselves from the face of a work, others of wanting to lead, then follow, before leading again and putting into practice what they learned from observing someone else in the driver's seat. These perspectives countered the idea that reaching a pinnacle of a hierarchy equals success or is necessarily a destination in and of itself. However, we heard that the performing arts doesn't always know how to respond to the different career trajectories that women may want or need to pursue and that, in particular, accessing resource and prestige was significantly easier for those who followed a more conventional path. This perpetuates and reaffirms an unnecessarily narrow appreciation of what a 'successful' career trajectory could look like and made it harder for women to access the resources and profile they needed to achieve their potential.

The world is imbalanced

The wider world, beyond the performing arts, is one that remains imbalanced in terms of how it treats men and women, girls and boys. All of us, from the time we were tiny, will have received a constant and complex stream of messages about how we should behave based on our sex, and how we should perceive others based on theirs. Some of these messages we will have spent time thinking about and either chosen to accept or reject. Others we won't have even registered. Instead, they will be lodged in our unconscious minds in the form of unconscious bias.

5 THINGS THE ORGANISATIONS ARE NOW THINKING ABOUT

Having concluded Advance, the nine organisations in the 2016 cohort have all written action plans outlining what they will now do in response to what they learned during the programme.

These action plans are unique, reflecting the individual make-up of each of these distinct organisations and the specific line of enquiry they selected for themselves. However there are certain common areas that, in addition to what is detailed in their action plans, many of them have told us they are now thinking about.

+ Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on Advance 2016
+ About the 2016 research and process

- 1 Information gathering**
This is about simple number crunching; monitoring on an ongoing basis how many men they employ and how many women to fulfil certain roles, and on which stages and with what level of resourcing. But it's also about doing more listening to the people who are working with them, or who could be working with them – is what is being provided for these people what is really needed? Are there gaps? Where could improvements be made?
- 2 Unconscious bias**
Everyone has unconscious bias! It's natural and normal. But it can't go unchecked. The first step is recognising everyone possesses it, the second is becoming aware of how it impacts on the decisions that are being made, and the third is putting strategies in place that address this.
- 3 Creating more symbiotic relationships with artists and freelancers**
This is being thought about in various ways, from addressing the manner in which freelancers come into contact with organisations to developing something that feels more like a two-way street; to creating circumstances or environments where the contact and exchange between a freelancer and organisation feels more equal and designed to suit the freelancer as much as the organisation; to following and supporting the career paths of artists in a more sustained way.
- 4 Applying the same level of thought and rigour to the employment of freelancers as to salaried staff**
There are helpful structures and processes in place around the employment of salaried staff, from recruitment through to care for well-being at (and away) from work, to regular evaluation and attention to career development. Learning that has been so successfully applied on the operational side can be carried over into the way an organisation manages its creative relationships.
- 5 Working collectively to achieve change**
Seeking out opportunities to activate change-making work in connection and collaboration with others, or in relation to others' work, so that needless repetition is avoided and optimal impact is achieved. Organisations are looking for where bridges can be built between them, and pathways created, so that change can take place in a more joined up way.

Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on what Advance 2016 set out to change.

Billy The Girl by Katie Hind (2013). Photo: Helen Maybanks

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REFLECTIONS

Q: What did Advance set out to change about the way the sector is thinking about or dealing with issues surrounding the under-representation of women?

LK: Advance, as a piece of work, is very focused on supporting organisations to identify and understand the root causes of inequalities. I think there can be a tendency in the arts to treat the symptoms of a lack of equality or diversity, rather than the cause. Most people – not all – but most I encounter in the arts, if I were to say to them, 'If I could give you a magic wand which you could use to instantly create proper equality and fairness across your organisation and all others, would you like that?' they'd go 'Yes please! Of course!' and mean it. But it's the gap between what we want to be in the arts and what we actually are that is the thing Advance, and a lot of the work that Tonic does, is interested in eliminating. We want to help organisations move from where they are to where they want to be but, in order to do that, we all need to properly understand what it is that's not working at the moment, essentially to say: why is it, that despite our goodwill and desire to achieve equality across our artistic programme and staff, it's not happening?

VL: Which is why we go away and do a lot of research around the questions organisations have and feedback in a layered way. And we try and hold them in the problem for at least half the process, so they're not jumping to conclusions about how to fix something.

LK: Yes, many people working in the arts are really good, swift problem solvers; they can make decisions really quickly, they can identify a problem, and then they can very promptly do something about it. But actually this work is about encouraging them to turn that part of their brains off. Because otherwise they may end up committing time, energy, and money to a solution which actually isn't the right one. Advance is about slowing things down: taking a few months to dig into their questions and really understand the intricacies of the problem and trying to untangle some of the knots.

A lot of the research we do during Advance involves us speaking to people who are affected by the issues that the organisations are looking into. This is important because otherwise you can have a group of people who aren't actually experiencing the problem jumping to conclusions about what the solution needs to be. It's very interesting that Northern Stage, for instance, who wanted to understand how they could better support small, female-led companies in their region, kept saying to us 'We have assumptions about what these women need from us, but we really want to use Advance to test whether these assumptions are correct.' So part of the process for them was about hearing from people who were not in the situation that the Northern Stage staff are; people who are not on salary, not in a core-funded organisation, who don't have a building to turn up to everyday, don't work as part of a large team, don't have access to resource or training. Also, the reason that Vicky and I are here to have those conversations is so people can talk quite candidly about how they're experiencing their careers. If, for instance, you're a freelancer you may not be able to say to an Artistic Director, 'Well, actually, this is what I find really problematic about how your organisation interacts with me' because you're hugely reliant on them, but you can say that to a third party who will feel that back anonymously.

VL: And organisations, of course, are able to describe quickly what it is that they are experiencing. They may, for example, say that they are experiencing some lack of confidence in the girls or women they engage with. But through working with us, they know we will be able to really dig into what is behind that. The New Wolsey Theatre shared something with me as we were working together: we spent some time looking at the work they have done and continue to do around disability – working with deaf and disabled artists. I remember Lorna Owen, the New Wolsey's Administration and Human Resources Manager, spoke to me about the Medical vs the Social Model. So, in working with the disabled artists, the New Wolsey's approach would not be 'There's something wrong with you that needs fixing', but rather 'There's something wrong with us. How can we put it right?'. And with organisations we were asking 'What might you change, given the new or greater understanding delivered through the research?' That question, really, is what led us into the second part of the process, where organisations began to think about what action to take.

LK: I think also, going back to what Advance could change about the way the sector is thinking about the subject of gender equality, I think seeing it as something that could be changed, could be improved was key. There's been a lot of talk for a very long time, and I think people were really craving demonstrable action.

VL: Yes, also we were keen to create a sense of excitement about the work. Rather than thinking about under-representation, we were asking 'What if there was greater representation? What would that look like? What if we were to have more and varied voices involved in making and presenting work, what could that do for art forms? What could audiences be experiencing that they aren't currently? And that took us into the imaginative realm, which is really where arts organisations love to be.

LK: Another thing that we did was encourage the organisations to really pay attention to, not just how many women they work with, but in what areas of their organisations and in which roles. Because, broadly speaking, women are well-represented in the performing arts workforce there can be a perception that 'We're fine. We've got loads of women. Just look around our offices: they're everywhere.' But actually once some of the organisations began to ask themselves questions like: 'But how many are on our Artistic Staff? How many are in particularly visible roles?' the answer was 'OK, not many' Or 'How many are making work resourced at a higher level or on our biggest stages?'. 'Oh ok. Not many'. So to do a bit of self-monitoring felt like quite an important thing to encourage the organisations to do as well.

Q: You worked with nine dance, opera, and theatre companies in the 2016 cohort of Advance. Why do you think the organisations were interested in taking part?

LK: I think they were really interested in it as a process. Arts organisations are generally run by people who are inquisitive, who want to constantly develop their own thinking, and to challenge themselves, and their organisation to be forward-looking. I think that the offer of spending a six-month period looking in quite a focused and intensive way at the topic of gender equality was attractive to a lot of the people that took part because it would enable them to do just that.

VL: And individually, all, I think, had various pieces of work they felt needed to be done in relation to gender equality and saw taking part in Advance as an opportunity to get on with that work.

For example, Sadler's Wells knew that there were challenges around the male to female ratio in choreography of contemporary dance. They had held a round table just six months or so before joining Advance to gather views from women on their experiences in the industry. They saw Advance as a timely vehicle, which would provide external expertise and additional capacity, allowing them to push on and take some action.

LK: I think also a feeling of responsibility played a role. All nine companies we worked with are National Portfolio Organisations. (i.e. core funded by Arts Council England) and so are in receipt of public funds and with this comes a responsibility to not only make great work within your own company, but to enrich the wider art form. This project was about them having the opportunity to connect up with other NPOs from across the country and in different art forms, and think collectively. 'What's the potential our organisations have as part of the National Portfolio and what's the responsibility we have to drive progress forward?'

VL: All of the organisations we have been working with have wanted to effect change and have realised that gesture is not enough, but had not quite had the opportunity to push forward and felt with Advance they could.

Q: What did you need to be mindful of with working with the organisations during the Advance process?

LK: We had to be incredibly efficient with people's time in order to get the best out of them. All these organisations have a range of priorities to look after. Of course gender equality is very important to them, but so are a range of other things, and these organisations only have so many staff and so many hours in the day. Performing arts companies operate on incredibly full yet strict schedules with constantly high workloads and timeframes that are often tight yet absolute: if you say you're going to open a show on a certain night you've got to deliver on that. So we need to be very mindful of all the plates they're spinning and exert just the right level of pressure so that the work gets done, but without them going into meltdown or feeling what we're demanding of them is unachievable.

An important part of this is about not overwhelming people. That's why we ask each organisation to select just one question they want to pursue during their time on the programme. It's about us saying 'Ok, we have six months with you. Realistically, we can look at one area in detail with you in that time. And we'd rather look at one area really well, and then at once hopefully leave you, six months down the line, with some tools you can use in other areas, rather than try to do everything at once sketchily'. That said, in other parts of the programme, like the Away Days, we do look more broadly at bigger, thematic questions and issues. But giving people a kind of scale of investigation for six months that feels achievable is important.

VL: And it's also been important positioning the organisation as central to the organisation's vision and mission, something that isn't additional, but which should form part of the organisation's DNA. This makes it easier for an organisation as a whole to adopt the project because it sees the work as part of the day-to-day running and development of the organisation.

LK: Yes, so one of the first things Vicky and I do is run an initial session with the staff from each organisation, and as part of that we ask them to tell us what their vision is for the next few years as an organisation: where do they feel they're heading? What changes do they see themselves making? Where do they want to be in a few years' time? And then our job is to figure out how this work we're doing with them on Advance fits in with that, supports it, and is sympathetic to it. Because this work has to be going in the general direction of travel that an organisation is heading in. It can't be that they are trying to head in one direction but this work is pulling them in another because that could lead to the people we're ultimately relying on to deliver this change feeling 'Where should my focus lie?' And if this work feels like it's supporting an organisation to achieve what it wants to achieve anyway, it's just going to be far more successful.

VL: Something else we had to be sensitive to was the different sizes of the organisations we were working with. Some of the organisations are large and complex. The Royal Opera House and National Theatre have hundreds of people working with them. The work of getting people across the organisation on board takes time, diaries need to be co-ordinated, people need to sign up, stuff needs to be signed off. So we worked at different paces with the different organisations and as they moved into creating action plans various time-scales have come into play too. Some organisations will be able to implement proposed changes quickly, others may take longer because there are more internal hoops to jump through.

Q: Advance is a programme that's designed to create change. Do you think change can feel scary or uncertain for performing arts organisations?

LK: I think change can feel scary or uncertain for anyone! But particularly in the instance of a performing arts organisation, yes, weirdly the more secure it is in itself the more challenging change can seem; if it feels it's on track, that it's doing its thing and doing it well, it's doing well in the Arts Council's eyes, it's doing well in terms of attracting audiences. It's financially keeping afloat, it's programming a really interesting, high quality range of work. The temptation can be to ask: why would we change that?

VL: Change is scary if an organisation takes it seriously. Organisations have looked at and talked through the research we've shared – to act on what they've heard, discussed and understood in a comprehensive way, to follow their understanding through to the nth degree equals fundamental change and I think that can be a difficult thing for an organisation. And so the way to deal with that is to take account of the big picture, but to look simultaneously at what steps can be taken, gradually, one after the other to move towards it. And also to see change as a sector, so that one organisation doesn't feel it needs to carry the full weight of the change people expect to see.

LK: Sometimes you do this work with an organisation and when it dawns on them that the change they need to make is within themselves, and how they work, how they think, how they approach things, that's when it can feel scary, and when sometimes you run the risk of people rejecting it. What this work often exposes is that the issue or the challenges or the barriers to women lie not within the women themselves, but in the way these organisations are set up. And that's not through any kind of fault from anyone currently within the organisations, but in the way things were set up in the dance, opera and theatre worlds decades ago. But in some ways it's easier and more comforting to assume the problem exists 'over there' with the women: to believe they're not confident enough, or committed enough, don't care enough, or aren't good enough. What's harder to process, and can often feel more troubling for an organisation, is the realisation that, 'Oh, ok, if this situation is going to change then we need to change.'

Also with work in equality and representation, people can worry that they're going to get it 'wrong', and that can make engaging in change-making work feel scary. People can worry – because they're often heading into uncharted territory – that they're going to propose a solution that will get some people's backs up, or has an unforeseen consequence which is negative. Particularly in the age of social media where an action or gesture can be made very, very public very, very quickly and can be criticised in a very, very visible way. I think that fear of getting it wrong can paralyse organisations and individuals to the point where they do nothing, rather than doing something and running the risk of failure. I think that a great shame when that fear of instigating change, because it may be received negatively, can prevent change from happening.

VL: I think that entering an environment, with other organisations, making mistakes, saying something, trying out an alternative, helps organisations on their way. It helps them to move into taking risk.

LK: Additionally, as we discussed earlier, arts organisations are often working very quickly and making decisions swiftly, because they often have a workload that exceeds the resources that they have to do that work on. Constantly doing everything at a high pace can mean that change can feel difficult because decisions often get made out of expediency i.e. 'what's the quickest and least problematic route to getting something done?', rather than 'what's the best possible route?' So people fall back on what they know. They may feel: 'We always put a creative team together like that. We know how to do that, and we can do it quite swiftly'. But when you begin to inject change, when you begin to say 'But, actually if you want to change the make-up of your creative team, you might need to invest more time and energy into the amount of artists that the amount of artistic director is meeting with. Or you might need to create a greater amount of budget to travel further afield to see work of more different types of artists based in different parts of the country, or in venues you might not normally go to.' All of that has an implication on resources. That sense of 'how we have been doing things works well enough' (i.e. we always put a creative team together on time, even if they are all white and all male) can get in the way of change, because if things are sort of motoring along fine, saying they need to be done better (i.e. we always put creative teams together on time AND they fairly reflect the make-up of 21st Century Britain), that can have consequences that may reach widely across the functionality of that organisation.

So I suppose that the priority of some things that these organisations have been working on, and speaking about, is how do you take everybody with you within an organisation? How do you let people know that change is coming, and it will require effort to make successful. But the goals and the possible rewards of implementing that change are so great, that it's worth going through that work, and it's worth making those risks.

VL: And if we think about the fact that all of these organisations are driven by wanting to present better, more interesting, more exciting art, then the idea of continuous improvement is current in all of their thinking. We have been thinking as a group about what that principle of continuous improvement means when we think about the organisation itself, and the way it connects to a subject such as equality and representation.

Q: What was the most inspiring part of working on the project for each of you?

LK: I think it's when I see the action plans that the organisations have put together. I've just, this afternoon, been reading the action plan that Mahogany Opera Group put together. And it's great the way they've boiled down these very big areas of thinking that they were doing, into some quite concrete things. It's very well thought through. It's very considered. It's all incredibly achievable. Also when I speak to someone who was in the 2014 Advance cohort, and they'll talk about a change that's happened in their organisation or about a piece of work that was presented on their stages that maybe wouldn't have previously been considered. That feels quite inspiring because you think 'This methodology can actually yield results. It's not going to fix it all. But it is making tangible change'.

VL: Yes, I agree. I think it's really exciting to see the action plans. Some of them are quite complex. Organisations are committing to a lot, in the short, mid and long term, across different strands of work, across different departments, even companies in the case of the Royal Opera House. The first cohort produced some bold actions, and in the second cohort we have bold actions, but we also have broader action plans that are in many cases tied to organisational plans which move organisations towards 2020 and beyond. It's inspiring to think that the work is 'locked in' in this way, that it is going to deliver in the long-term.

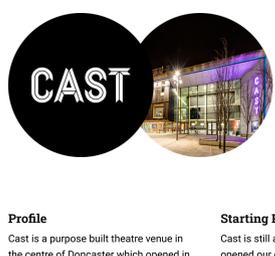
And I should say that the way that organisations have committed to this project has been inspiring. They will have invited us in, opened the doors, given us access to people and information at every level has been brilliant – their willingness to make themselves open and vulnerable.

LK: I think it's also felt inspiring when you can see people joining up the dots between this work and other work they want to do in their organisations in regards to other areas of equality, representation, and diversity. You can sometimes see a penny drop as someone kind of goes, 'This problem that we've been concerned about, but haven't known how to address it: now we can see a way in.'

Advance 2016 was co-led by the Director of Tonic, [Lucy Kerbel](#) and [Vicky Long](#), a freelance research and producer. Research they conducted with the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama's Post Doctoral Researcher [Dr. Lisa Woyrnarski](#) was central to the Advance 2016 [process](#). Read about their personal connection to the subject of change, and more about Tonic's role in Advance on the links below.

[+ Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long on the subject of change](#)

[+ Tonic's role in Advance 2016](#)



Profile
Cast is a purpose built theatre venue in the centre of Doncaster which opened in September 2013...

Starting Point
Cast is still a very new enterprise: we opened our doors for the first time just three years ago and, as such, are still in the process of looking at the structure and output of our organisation...

What We Did
Tonic met with and interviewed a range of female artists who have been involved in Cast since we opened, speaking with them about their experiences with us and what more they would like to have access to in terms of their development here...

- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Our experience
- + Creative team stats



<p>Founded in 2012</p> <p>Building based Main House (620 capacity) Second Space (152 capacity)</p>	<p>Previous Director Kully Thiarai Since 2013, currently recruiting for her replacement</p> <p>Public Funding £320,000 Total subsidy from Arts Council England in the 2015/16 financial year</p>	<p>CAST</p> <p>Location Doncaster, Yorkshire</p>	<p>Profile</p> <p>Cast is a purpose built theatre venue in the centre of Doncaster which opened in September 2013. The flagship building of the new Civic and Cultural Quarter (CCQ) development is run by the autonomous charity that is Doncaster Performance Venue (also known as and trading as Cast).</p> <p>The building comprises a 620-seat lyric theatre with fly tower, a 152 seat flexible-use black box studio, two making spaces (Dance and Drama) and two linked Meeting Rooms.</p> <p>The artistic programme relies mainly on touring product and local amateur hires though Cast produces its own in-house pantomime and, owing to a three-year funding stream, was able to produce three mid-scale season openers between 2013 and 2015, <i>The Glee Club</i>, <i>Kes</i> and <i>Dancehall</i>.</p> <p>+ www.castindoncaster.com</p>
<p>Productions 2 In-house productions staged in the 2015/16 financial year</p>	<p>Staff 22 Core full-time staff 8 Core part-time staff 2 Associate roles</p>		

Our Question

Do the development needs of male and female artists differ and if so, how? When formalising an artist development programme, how do we ensure women and their needs are properly represented in it?

Cast is still a very new enterprise: we opened our doors for the first time just three years ago and, as such, are still in the process of looking at the structure and output of our organisation. The way we work with artists is one aspect of this. While we've been engaging with local artists and companies since we opened through programming their work, connecting via monthly 'hang outs' and skill development workshops, and providing in kind support such as rehearsal space and technical support, much of this was done on an ad hoc or exploratory basis. When Tonic first approached us in late 2015 about joining Advance, we were on the brink of formalising a more permanent programme of artist/talent development and support. We took the opportunity that Advance provided to consider how an awareness of the specific needs of women should feed into this.

WHAT WE DID

Tonic met with and interviewed a range of female artists who have been involved in Cast since we opened, speaking with them about their experiences with us and what more they would like to have access to in terms of their development here. They also interviewed women who had been involved in artist development structures in theatres and performing arts organisations across the country. This enabled us to look to longer-running artist development programmes to learn what had worked well and what less so.

They spoke to women who were in the early stages of their careers – just encountering artist development programmes for the first time – as well as those who were far more established in their careers, so they could reflect on what, looking back, had or hadn't been useful to them at key points along the way: what had made the difference in a positive way? Where had they felt they'd stalled or fallen between the gaps? What, in hindsight, do they wish had been in place to help with this?

WHAT WE LEARNED

When Tonic first met with us to discuss our research question, we said we had noticed that of the artists and companies we had supported to date, a greater proportion were male/male-led and we wondered if that was because they had been more proactive about knocking on our door and more confident in their dealings with us.

Research has shown us that women, even later in their careers, are less likely to have their work programmed on bigger stages (thereby commanding a higher fee and insulating them financially so they can go on to make more work) and we heard suggestions that in part this may be because their work – how they tell stories, what stories they choose to tell – may be less immediately understandable to funders and venues because it doesn't resemble the kind of work that has been dominant and which they are therefore used to seeing or have 'short cuts' to understanding.

The research did indeed show that women tend to be far more reticent in asking for things from theatres, and are more concerned about being seen as a nuisance or taking up people's time. Given that the messages women receive often dissuade them from being front-footed or assertive it perhaps isn't surprising that this translates into how they may interact with venues. This led to thinking around how we can be more proactive in making offers to artists, rather than waiting for them to come to us.

We heard that brief coffee meetings with programmers or the limited word count on a funding application form may not provide the space for artists with less familiar modes of expression to convey what it is they do. Artists also spoke about the frustration of being put 'in boxes' based on their gender (and in some cases, their gender in combination with their ethnicity) i.e. venues and programmers making assumptions about what they would want to make work about and on what scale. Paradoxically, they said it could also be difficult if they confounded the expectations of programmers and venues who struggled to identify where on their ladder of progression to accommodate them, something that could result in artists and companies getting 'stuck' on the lower tiers.

We learned that advice and provision currently available to artists is largely geared up to anticipate a certain kind of career trajectory, and assumes a particular way of working. This doesn't necessarily apply to as many women because, we heard, their lives, and therefore their careers, don't necessarily follow a linear route, nor are they automatically interested in having just one creative outlet, but may want to combine several, something that artist development programmes – or the way that venues think about developing artists and companies through how and in which spaces they programme them – don't always respond to. We found that much support is concentrated at early-career level but we heard that artists, and especially women, may instead want support at later points in their careers, especially after taking time out or focusing on another strand of their practice. It seems that less rigidity in development support, and a greater level of responsiveness to the individual circumstances of artists is important.

We learned that overwhelmingly support offered by theatres for artists and companies focuses on supporting the creative work itself, but rarely the career/organisational structures underpinning it. So lots of free rehearsal rooms and opportunities to do scratch performances (which are of course valuable) but very little on business planning, financial strategising, or organisational skills. This means artists or companies may be flourishing artistically but failing to develop their sustainability, meaning their artistic work – however well-developed – is at risk. For women, given the greater level of financial instability they may be experiencing, this can be particularly dangerous. We know that the question of whether organisations can support the business side as well as the artistic output of independent companies and artists is something Northern Stage is now also thinking about.

WHAT WE'RE DOING IN RESPONSE

Cast is currently in a period of transition. We are in the process of appointing a new Director as well as several other key management roles. Once these pivotal figures are in place, and we are moving ahead with formalising our artist development programmes, we will be looking at the findings of the Advance research afresh and considering how they will feed into what that programme looks like and what it will deliver for artists. In the meantime, we're continuing to monitor our numbers, using the gender tracker format we were introduced to during Advance, and we're being more thoughtful about checking for unconscious bias in our actions and outputs.

IS THIS WORK A STEP TOWARDS A BIGGER GOAL?

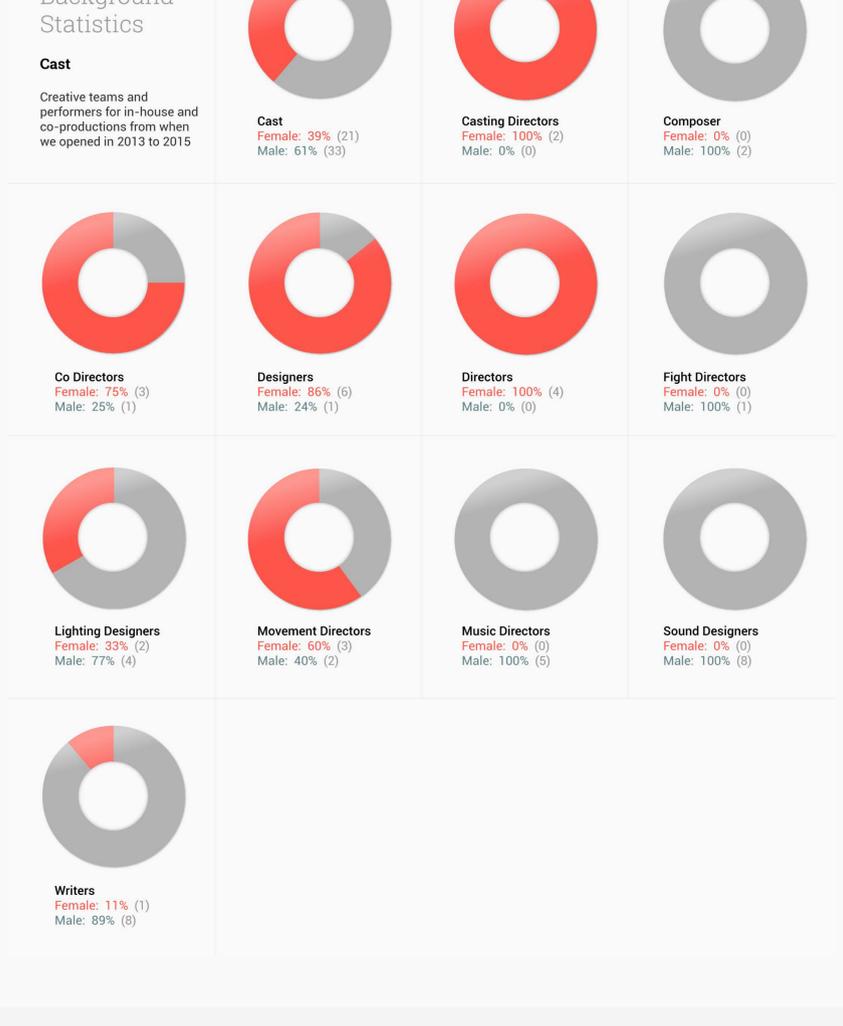
This work is part of the on-going evolution of a young organisation. Cast's purpose is not just to stage great performance for people in Doncaster, but to grow an arts ecology in the town so that, over time, what goes on stage and happens in our studios and rooms is of the people of Doncaster. To achieve that we need to make sure that all people in our area, regardless of gender, want to and are able to be involved in what we are doing and that for the artists among them, we are supporting their development in the best possible and most meaningful way.

CLARE CLARKSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, CAST

"When we were first approached by Tonic to take part in the Advance programme our then Artistic Director, Kully Thiarai, and I were slightly bemused. "But surely this has got nothing to do with us? We're two women running a new organisation fully aware of all the pitfalls of unchecked patriarchy!" Even coming up with the research question was frustrating... "Well, we're open-minded and this or that just doesn't apply to Cast." Right up to the first meeting of the cohort there was a sense that 'we were OK' and we were going to help out all the old dinosaurs of organisations that didn't know how to run a fair and equal operation.

It was really great meeting with our fellow participants who were, of course, turned on and bright and not in the least bit dinosaur-ish. In fact they kind of looked like us. Which is the point...or at least one of the points. It's all too easy to assume that because you've got a woman at the top of your organisation or a couple of female technicians everything's running as it should. The detail in our colleagues' research enquiries was fascinating, digging down to levels that we hadn't really considered. Questions of composers and choreographers, about engaging with ingrained views that were passed down through education and employment practices in ways that we're barely aware of. The best thing about the Away Days was the opportunity to stop and think about not how we did things, but why? Why do we make this choice or that and how can we stop the dreaded 'unconscious bias' bleeding in to our practice? In fact, our research question – relating to the specific needs (if any) of females in a newly developed artist development programme – ended up being a vehicle to understand bigger issues rather than the primary focus. So many other factors and considerations opened up around it, like peeling the layers off an onion.

Through the Advance process we discovered that we actually do have a pretty gender balanced workforce and all of our Directors and most of our co-Directors had been women (but then how is that fair?). Our casts are a little male leaning and we've got a way to go in terms of supporting female Sound Designers. Personally I found that my world had tipped just a little on its axis and so I wanted to hear their in a different way – bristling when one of the Away Day participants referred to their 'Chairman' instead of just their 'Chair' (unless this really was a role preserved for men?) and rooting for Mother Goose over Robin Hood for the next pantomime title. It's been a great experience for me and the organisation and now the challenge is to make the difference...every day."



WHY DO THIS WORK? The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry... + More

5 KEY INSIGHTS Five things the Advance 2016 organisations are now thinking about... + More

REFLECTIONS Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on what Advance 2016 set out to change... + More

CAST

CLEAN BREAK

MARQUEAN OPERA GROUP

NATIONAL THEATRE

NEW WILSEY THEATRE

NORTHERN BALLET

NORTHERN STAGE

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE

SADLER'S WELLS



Our Question

“How can we alter our structures to increase the diversity of the women we employ to create a power shift at Clean Break and lasting change within the theatre industry?”

Profile

Acclaimed theatre company Clean Break produces ground-breaking plays with women writers and actors at the heart of its work. We are a women-only organisation and this extends to our creative and stage management teams...



Starting Point

Because Clean Break is a women-only organisation we began knowing that the number of women we work with isn't where our attention should rest. Rather, we were interested in using the process to examine whether there are certain groups of women we are less likely to engage with...



What We Did

We dedicated a board meeting to the broader question of diversity via a 'long table' discussion early on in the process and are progressing plans to recruit more trustees with 'lived experience' of the criminal justice system...



- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Watch video interview

Profile Our question What we did What we learned Video interview



Jorah Bruce, Theresa Lewis, Laura Lomas, Chino Odimba and Ursula (Rani) Sarma (2015, 16). Photo: Katherine Leadale

Founded in
1979

Head of Artistic Programme
Róisín McBrinn

Since 2014

Executive Director

Lucy Perman



Profile

Acclaimed theatre company Clean Break produces ground-breaking plays with women writers and actors at the heart of its work. Founded in 1979 by two women prisoners who needed urgently to tell their stories through theatre, the company today has an independent education programme delivering theatre opportunities to women with experience of the criminal justice system and women at risk, in custodial and community settings.

Clean Break's innovative education work, combined with visionary expertise in theatre, makes for a powerful mix. Celebrated by critics and audience across the UK, the company's award winning plays hit a collective nerve, humanising some of the most difficult things we need to talk about as a society.

Recent productions include: Somalia Seaton's **House** and Chino Odimba's **Amongst the Reeds** (Edinburgh and Yard Theatre); **Joanne** (Soho Theatre and The Other Place, RSC); Vivienne Franzmann's **Pests** (Royal Exchange Theatre /Royal Court Theatre co-production and touring); **it felt empty when the heart went at first but it is alright now** by Lucy Kirkwood (Arcola Theatre, joint winner of the John Whiting Award 2010); and **This Wide Night** by Chloë Moss (Soho Theatre 2008 and revived in 2009, winner of the Susan Smith Blackburn Award 2009).

Productions from Graduates of our Theatre Education Programme include: **Spent** by Katherine Chandler (tour); **Sweatbox** by Chloë Moss (Latitude and tour); **Meal Ticket** devised in collaboration with Forced Entertainment (Latitude) and **Frientimacy** by Stacey Gregg (Donmar Studios).

- + www.cleanbreak.org.uk
- + twitter.com/CleanBrik
- + facebook.com/cleanbreak



Company Type
Touring

Public Funding
£216,195

Total subsidy from Arts Council England in the 2015/16 financial year



Location
London

Productions
3

Staged in the 2015/16 financial year (1 professional work and 2 graduate works)

Staff

8 Core full-time staff

17 Core part-time staff

0 Associate roles

Our Question

How can we alter our structures to increase the diversity of the women we employ to create a power shift at Clean Break and lasting change within the theatre industry?

Because Clean Break is a women-only organisation we began Advance knowing that the number of women we work with isn't where our attention should rest. Rather, we were interested in using the process to examine whether there are certain groups of women we are less likely to engage with and if so, how we could remedy that.

WHAT WE DID

When we first embarked on the journey, we had planned to make the focus ethnic diversity within our artistic programme. This would have ultimately meant that we would have placed a microscope over how we recruit and work with freelance theatre artists. It became clear quite quickly though that there wasn't enough depth to this challenge, especially given that we were particularly keen to use the process to better understand how we could create lasting change in the company.

Starting Point

We were already working with a broad range of artists and had previously conducted research into emerging writers from BAME backgrounds; and we had used this research to set up an emerging writers' programme. But, more importantly, we didn't feel that the question, and attempting to answer it, would have enough far reaching impact on the company as a whole, into the future. We were interested in power and who within Clean Break has a seat at the table when it comes to decision making about the company's work as well as our core values and activity.

At one of the early Away Days, our Head of Artistic Programme, Róisín McBrinn, was asked by a cohort member what she was doing to ensure that there was someone working with her or within the company to replace her when she moves on. When she brought this challenge back to the senior management team, it helped to move forward considerably our discussions about diversity across the company beyond the artistic programme. This, in turn, facilitated more meaningful debate about diversity within Clean Break, including across our permanent staff team and especially at senior management level.

Our company was set up by two women prisoners in 1979 and the contribution that students on our education programme (women with experience of the criminal justice system/women at risk) make to the organisation has always been central to our vision. In fact, the women on our education programme play a part in shaping what is on offer to them but we want to improve on, and deepen this engagement. A diversity of lived experience* amongst our trustees and our entire employed team became much more central to what we felt the company needed to look at altering. We wanted to start to focus on the structures for progression within the company for both staff members, volunteers and students to ensure that when answering the question of 'who will take over', we had done everything in our power to answer it with some solid options that would reflect our commitment to change in women's lives and in the wider theatre industry.

* ie we were interested in particular in experience of the criminal justice system or of being at risk of entering it due to poor mental health, drugs or alcohol dependencies – in line with the criteria for joining Clean Break's theatre education programme as a student.

Investigation

We dedicated a board meeting to the broader question of diversity via a 'long table' discussion early on in the process and are progressing plans to recruit more trustees with 'lived experience' of the criminal justice system. It was, and continues to be, important for us that the board continues to engage actively with this ambition, and holds us accountable for decisions we are making now, and in the future.

We wanted to know more about what might prevent us from attracting or identifying a wide range of women to take on roles in our permanent staff, especially at senior/leadership level. As part of this, Tonic conducted research into progression routes in arts management for – and also barriers commonly experienced by – women, particularly focusing on the experience of BAME, and working class women and those with lived experience. They interviewed women working in arts management/with aspirations to work in arts management who are based in various parts of the UK and who represent a spectrum of roles and career levels, ranging from apprentice level to executive leaders in National Portfolio organisations. This was supplemented by drawing together insights from research studies conducted over the last fifteen years into career progression routes for BAME people and women, both within the arts and beyond in other sectors. This enabled Tonic to bring us some key findings on why some women may be less visible or appear (although not necessarily be) less qualified when arts companies such as ours are sourcing talent, especially for more senior roles.

Tonic also did some really interesting and useful research around how we were recruiting. As well as feedback from a focus group of women theatre professionals from BAME and white working class backgrounds, Tonic also gave us a response to our recruitment pack from a leading theatre professional who has spent many years focusing on recruiting theatre professionals from less conventional backgrounds. This tangible information was massively helpful and, as a result, we have altered the language and approach to our recruitment, learning from best practice in the sector. This is something that we will continue to explore and challenge.

We are in the middle of researching options for Clean Break to create an associate artist scheme for early to midcareer theatre artists. Interviews that Tonic conducted with artists we have worked with on what that could entail will feed into our thinking. We want to ensure that we are creating paid opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage with the company but also to have a chance to engage with the wider theatre sector with our help through mentoring, enhancing skills and experience, and introductions. Simultaneously we are having discussions about how we can make the pathways for Clean Break volunteers and graduate students more embedded in the company.

Like most NPOs* we are in the middle of writing our business plan for the next four year cycle of Arts Council funding. We have changed our approach to how we form our plans by more actively involving the wider staff team and students/former students, and encouraging them to input not just in their specific area of expertise. We are dedicating team away days to these themes and are sharing our Tonic findings and ambitions with all staff members to encourage as much involvement and input as possible.

* National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) are those in receipt of core funding from Arts Council England, for the period April 2015 to March 2018

WHAT WE LEARNED

For Clean Break, this work is ongoing. However, in the short term, it has been challenging for us to consider what progressive means when it comes to Clean Break and to really consider what long term steps we are making to maintain a commitment to our radical origins. We've learnt that it is necessary to take risks to achieve these goals and that we need to be brave and honest in embracing these to change the status quo and impact positively on our diversity. We are committed to embracing this philosophy to ensure that we remain at the forefront of change and equality.

The process was a brilliant reminder that external perceptions of the company are really important – be that when an audience member meets the company through a theatre production, when a student enters our doors, or how we present ourselves online and when we are recruiting. We are learning to look in more detail and with more care at all of our messaging,

Another big part of the learning was how much of the work in this arena can be done in a 'from the bottom' up manner within the structure of the company.

A lot of the resources we need for change already exist in the company and that by altering the questions we are asking staff members, broadening the platforms to hear more from the wider staff team, and by being really bold and open about our intentions with as many people as possible, we can enhance and utilise our existing resources to go some way towards achieving our aims.

It has also been a very interesting process for Clean Break to consider our place within the larger theatre ecology and to focus on how we can influence best practice in terms of gender equality across the sector. The work we are doing on diversity beyond gender, we hope, will impact positively on the wider theatre sector.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

Our six months with Tonic is only the tip of the iceberg. Our plans are very long term and are absolutely centered around succession planning, how we present our company and how we can be acknowledged as a force for change in the theatre sector. Underpinning all this is a live process of ongoing questioning of what more we can do to achieve our goals.

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

5 KEY INSIGHTS

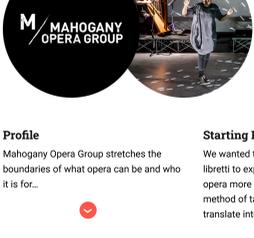
Five things the Advance 2016 organisations are now thinking about...

+ More

REFLECTIONS

Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on what Advance 2016 set out to change...

+ More



Profile
Mahogany Opera Group stretches the boundaries of what opera can be and who it is for...

Starting Point
We wanted to use the narrow focus on libretti to explore the role of women within opera more generally. Hoping to test a method of tackling inequality that could translate into other areas of our work...

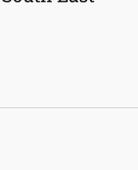
What We Did
We explored what pathways currently exist for people writing libretti, to give us a clear idea of where the gaps existed...

- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Our experience
- + Watch video interview
- + Creative team stats



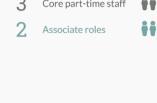
Founded in **1998**
(as The Opera Group)

Artistic Director **Frederic Wake-Walker**
Since 2011



Profile
Mahogany Opera Group is a leading independent opera company that stretches the boundaries of what opera can be and who it is for.

Company Type
Touring
Our work has toured extensively within the UK to places such as the Barbican, Royal Opera House, Buxton Festival, and Edinburgh International Festival and internationally to Paris, Barcelona, Bregenz, Zurich, Berlin, St Petersburg, Bergen, Stockholm and New York.



Location
London / South East

Mahogany formed in 2014, bringing together two acclaimed companies specialising in creating and touring new work: The Opera Group and Mahogany Opera. Mahogany creates new opera in new ways, performing in different spaces and place throughout the UK and internationally. We collaborate with established and emerging artists, drawing on a range of cultural influences, theatrical methods and artforms. Our projects are created through our landmark research and development programme, Various Stages, which not only gives artists creative freedom, but also involves audiences throughout the process.

Productions
5
Staged in the 2015/16 financial year

Staff
4 Core full-time staff
3 Core part-time staff
2 Associate roles

Recent productions include: **The Ratler**, a new interactive retelling of **Rumpelstiltskin** for families by Stephen Deazley and Martin Riley; Rolf Hind's mindfulness opera **Lost in Thought**; Emily Hall's **Folle à Deux**; Hans Krása's **Brundisair** with children from across the UK, and cabaret opera **Gloria - A Pigtales** by H K Gruber.

Other work as The Opera Group and Mahogany Opera includes: David Bruce's Olivier Award-nominated **The Firework-Maker's Daughter**; Benjamin Britten's **Church Parables**; Harrison Birtwistle's **Bow Down** and Kurt Weill's **Street Scene**, which won the Evening Standard Award for Best Musical 2008.

+ mahoganyoperagroup.co.uk

Our Question

Where are the female opera librettists? What routes are currently available for aspiring librettists? How can we broaden these opportunities and encourage more women to consider writing libretti?

We initially asked the question as Mahogany has, to date, never commissioned a female librettist. This is despite commissioning several new operas over a number of years. We wanted to use this fairly narrow focus to explore the role of women within opera more generally. We hoped to test a method of tackling inequality that can translate into other areas of our work.

WHAT WE DID

"We started the Advance programme with a fairly narrow line of questioning – looking at female librettists – but the process has transformed our thinking, with the realisation that issues and barriers actually exist much more broadly in the perception of women within the opera sector."
MICHAEL DUFFY, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP

Investigation

Tonic set out to explore what pathways currently exist for people interested in writing libretti and how, once they've found a route in, they can maintain and develop a career in opera writing. From here, Tonic sought to understand what about these pathways may feel appealing and accessible to women and what less so. To do this they interviewed and ran focus groups with lots of opera-making women, including those who are or have written opera libretti, both those starting out and those more established.

They also spoke to opera 'gatekeepers', producers, artistic directors, and those involved in training. They researched courses and training opportunities that are currently open to upcoming librettists, and also did some number crunching, looking at the gender of librettists commissioned by a range of opera companies across the UK over a 12 month period.

All of this gave us a clear idea of where the gaps existed in terms of entry points for people keen to write libretti, but also enabled us to reflect on the wider context of opera: the place of women in that context, the power dynamic between librettists and composers during the writing process, and also our own role as opera 'gatekeepers'.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Rather than there being a lack of women who want to write libretti, the research suggested that there are plenty of women writing libretti, but a lower chance that they will be commissioned, for a range of reasons.

The research focused on two areas: the challenges librettists can face in building and maintaining a career, and the challenges that women may face in creative roles in opera. By over-laying these two areas, and understanding how they intersect, we could gain a perspective on female librettists' experiences.

Those interviewed commented on the following challenges facing librettists

- There are few formal routes in to writing libretti and, in comparison to many other artistic roles, fewer artist/career development opportunities. Even for established librettists there aren't that many paid commissions, reflecting the relatively low number of new operas being commissioned in the UK annually. Writing a libretto can be a lengthy and highly involved process, and the fee given may not reflect this.
 - In a conventional writing relationship, the librettist is generally junior to the composer who has final say over which parts of the text are used and how. Consequently librettists have lower status in the creative process and limited autonomy over how their words are used in the final production.
 - There are currently few opportunities through which librettists and composers can get to know one another, or test out working relationships outside of being commissioned. So composers may choose to repeatedly work with librettists they already know or who appear to them to be 'safe', or familiar.
 - Unlike many theatres with dedicated Literary departments, there is generally little resource within opera houses for anyone on the creative staff to be responsible for getting to know writers or their work. Consequently it can be hard for librettists to get a foot in the door or onto the radar of an opera house.
 - While the music for a new opera may be given proper resourcing in terms of its development, this is less likely to be the case for the text. Consequently librettists' work may not be given the development time or attention it needs. Yet having a 'flop' attached to them is something which, in the risk-averse context of opera, is difficult for a librettist – especially a less established one – to recover from.
- ### Challenges for woman in creative roles in opera
- The research suggested there are complex issues in regards to how women are viewed in the opera world generally. In particular whether they are taken seriously as creators.
 - Overwhelmingly 'gatekeepers' in the opera world, including those involved in the commissioning of new opera, are male and relatively homogenous in terms of age, ethnicity, and class background. This means the bulk of artistic decisions about what work gets made in UK opera and by who is taken by a relatively narrow group.
 - In addition to this, the majority of people in training and working professionally as composers are male.
 - It was felt that the lack of resource given to development of texts (as noted above) can mean less traditional modes of storytelling (and in particular, storytelling about women that doesn't adhere to classic 'tropes' of femininity) is not given the time or space to be developed, understood or appreciated by other people involved in the commissioning, development, and staging of a new opera.
 - The opera world can be 'risk adverse' and protective of its heritage. This heritage is one in which women aren't particularly visible as creators. This can mean women are, either consciously or unconsciously, perceived as being risky if placed in a creative role, because they don't resemble the people who, historically, have undertaken these roles.

While the research that Tonic conducted was initiated by our question about female librettists, it exploded our thinking into many more areas than we had initially expected. We're now thinking about how we work with women across all creative roles and also what Mahogany Opera Group's role, as an organisation that stretches the boundaries of what opera can be and who it is for, can be in addressing some of the challenges the research identified.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

"The process has really helped us move our thinking forward, offering up new avenues for how we create work, as well as who/how we are making creative decisions. Exploring existing restrictions and inequalities has set us on a path to both making change and making more interesting, more relevant work."
ALLY ROSSER, GENERAL MANAGER, MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP

What we want to do in response to what we learned

- Build awareness of diversity into decision making across the organisation; we're becoming far more thorough in monitoring ourselves, being clearer with the freelancers we employ about what we expect of them, and providing training for our staff and Board.
- Broaden the way in which our artistic decisions are made; we're ensuring a wider range of people, with a broader base of perspectives, backgrounds, and tastes are involved and have a voice.
- Widen our pool of artists and how we source new talent and in particular create a greater number of opportunities for librettists; we're initiating a range of 'open calls' so we can get to know a broader range of artists and are rethinking the nature of the R&D opportunities we provide.
- Challenge the convention of libretto writing and how new opera is made; we want to consult partner organisations about how we can challenge conventions, make links with others who are keen to develop more equitable relationships between librettists and composers, and learn about ways that librettists and their work could be better supported and developed by organisations.
- Inspire young girls to consider all professional careers in opera open to them; we're ensuring that across all our communications the contributions and perspectives of the women involved in our work are as visible as those of the men. We're especially focusing on this in regards to our children and young people's work because we want girls to see that all roles in opera are open to them.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

We're very conscious of the issues surrounding equality and diversity in opera (and the arts generally). We want our work to be open to everyone, as artists, audiences, participants and staff. By focusing on one specific area, gender equality, we have been able to open up our thinking. We have been able to explore solutions and activity that we can apply more widely to enable greater access.

ALISON PORTER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP

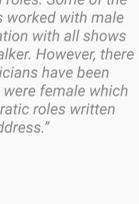
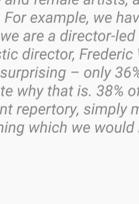
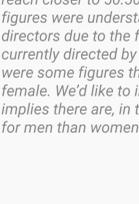
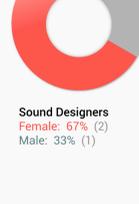
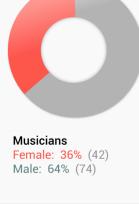
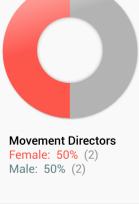
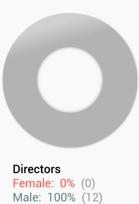
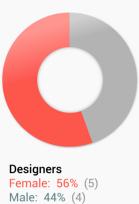
"We knew that gender equality was an issue for opera, but to an extent there's a general assumption that other issues in equality and diversity are more pressing. However, Advance not only opened our eyes to some stark realities concerning gender inequality, but has also given us tools and confidence to approach other areas of inequality going forward."

MICHAEL DUFFY, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP

"The depth of the research Tonic undertook was fantastic. It shone a light on practices and processes within the opera sector, allowing us to interrogate the question to a degree that we would never have been able to do ourselves. This might sound overwhelming, but the support and structure of Advance meant that there was plenty of time to digest and ask questions."

Background Statistics

Mahogany Opera Group
Creative teams and performers from 2011 to 2015



"The Gender Tracker was a stark reminder, although not a surprise, of the work we need to do around gender equality. Over the next few years, we will aim to reach closer to 50:50 of male and female artists, across all roles. Some of the figures were understandable. For example, we have always worked with male directors due to the fact that we are a director-led organisation with all shows currently directed by our artistic director, Frederic Wake-Walker. However, there were some figures that were surprising – only 36% of musicians have been female. We'd like to investigate why that is. 38% of singers were female which implies there are, in the current repertory, simply more operatic roles written for men than women. Something which we would like to address."

WHY DO THIS WORK?
The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...
+ More

5 KEY INSIGHTS
Five things the Advance 2016 organisations are now thinking about...
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REFLECTIONS
Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on what Advance 2016 set out to change...
+ More



Our Question

"What about how we currently communicate within the NT supports our aspiration to work more effectively with women and what could stand in our way? How can we ensure a full range of voices and perspectives are both heard and supported within our organisation and are given full opportunity to be expressed in the work we make?"

Profile

At the National, we make world-class theatre that is entertaining, challenging and inspiring. And we make it for everyone...

Starting Point

We chose to focus on meetings as a particular aspect of our internal communications, as the NT has a large staff and works with a lot of freelance artists, so much of our work happens in meetings...

What We Did

We investigated the way we run meetings - who speaks and when, how decisions are made, how we discuss problems - things that often go unquestioned...

- + What we learned
+ What we're doing differently
+ Watch video interview
+ Creative team stats



Ma Rainey at the National Theatre. Photo: Johan Persson

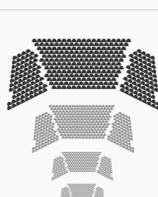
Founded in 1963

Artistic Director Rufus Norris Since 2015

National Theatre

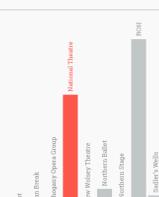
Profile

At the National, we make world-class theatre that is entertaining, challenging and inspiring. And we make it for everyone.



Company Type Building based

Building based with touring and broadcast programmes. Olivier Theatre (1100 capacity), Lyttelton Theatre (890 capacity), Dorfman Theatre (400 capacity), Temporary Theatre (225 capacity, closed July 2016).



Public Funding £17.5m

£17.2m total NPO funding from Arts Council England in the 2015/16 financial year (and a £250k strategic touring grant for War Horse China)



Location London

The work we stage at our South Bank home each year ranges from re-imagined classics - such as Greek tragedy and Shakespeare - to modern masterpieces and new work by contemporary writers and theatre-makers. The work we make strives to be as open, as diverse, as collaborative and as national as possible. Much of that new work is researched and developed at the New Work Department: we are committed to nurturing innovative work from new writers, directors, creative artists and performers. Equally, we are committed to education, with a wide-ranging Learning programme for all ages in our new Clore Learning Centre and in schools and communities right across the UK.

The National's work is also seen on tour throughout the UK and internationally, and in collaborations and co-productions with regional theatres. Popular shows transfer to the West End and occasionally to Broadway, and through the National Theatre Live programme, we broadcast live performances to over 2,000 cinemas in 55 countries around the world. Through National Theatre: On Demand in Schools three acclaimed, curriculum-linked productions free to stream on demand in every secondary school in the country. Online, the NT offers a rich variety or innovative digital content on every aspect of theatre.

We do all we can to keep ticket prices affordable and to reach a wide audience, and use our public funding to maintain artistic risk-taking, accessibility and diversity.

+ www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

Productions 34

Staged in our building in the 2015/16 financial year. Also: 3 international tours of War Horse

- 3 productions of Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time in the West End, UK tour and on Broadway
79 productions during River Stage Festival, our free outdoor festival programme

Staff 526

Core full-time staff



142

Core part-time staff



11

Associate roles



Our Question

What about how we currently communicate within the NT supports our aspiration to work more effectively with women and what could stand in our way? How can the NT, in line with its mission to make outstanding theatre, ensure a full range of voices and perspectives are both heard and supported within our organisation and are given full opportunity to be expressed in the work we make?

We had already set some organisational targets around gender parity in terms of the artistic work that we create. To sit alongside that very public commitment, we were also keen to look more deeply at our embedded working culture, to explore whether the way we conduct our everyday business might be holding up some deep-rooted unconscious gender biases. As industry influencers, we wanted to make sure that our own behaviours weren't going unchecked. It felt particularly fascinating to use the opportunity to do some exploration with Tonic around gender-based inequalities (traditionally masculine and feminine traits), rather than binary sexual inequality (male and female).

WHAT WE DID

Tonic suggested that focusing in a particular aspect of our internal communications might reveal a lot, and meetings sprang out as an interesting thing to dissect - the NT has a large staff and works with a lot of freelance artists, so much of our work happens in meetings.

We took a sweep of the different regular meetings - artistic, operational, departmental etc. - and asked Tonic to sit in on them and make forensic notes about our behaviours. Tonic also conducted interviews with a range of staff from across the organisation to hear how they experience and perceive meetings at the NT.

What We Learned

The way we run meetings - who speaks and when, how decisions are made, how we discuss problems - often go unquestioned. Big groups of people working to tight deadlines need to 'get stuff done' and quickly, and this seemed to result in a particular way of running a meeting. We began to question whether this tendency towards speed of thought meant we were giving more airtime to authoritative, decisive voices. We noticed that those authoritative voices often carry perceived male behaviours - louder, more confident, invoking action rather than discussion, more about talking than listening. It was particularly fascinating to consider the way we communicate through a gender lens.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

We're at the very beginning of this research, and so the initial actions and outcomes are only just emerging. We want to dig a bit deeper, extending this research into more departments. It will be interesting to observe whether there are different patterns in our different fields of work - in Technical, or Production, or Commercial Operations for example. We'd also like to look at how we communicate with freelancers. As a result, Our Senior Management Team are undertaking training into meeting facilitation, and we're looking into how other cultural leaders run their internal communications. In beginning to analyse our meetings and how we communicate in them, we're becoming more mindful that the meetings structure and culture that we currently work to is a construct that is open to being questioned and evolved. It's not an orthodoxy, and that feels very freeing.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

This work with Tonic has made us realise that for a creative organisation, we haven't been thinking particularly creatively about how we conduct meetings. Over the coming year we will be dedicating proper resource to scoping out, innovating, and trialing alternatives. In particular we want to consider how the creativity, playfulness, and attention to detail with which we make our productions can be applied to how we run our meetings. In part this work will be focused on understanding how the NT can get better at hearing from a range of voices, by being more open to and supportive of the different ways that people communicate. It's also about us developing a variety of 'settings' that we can operate on and switch between deftly so that we have a wider palate of meeting structures and styles to work from, and which will better underpin the broadness of our outputs. We know, for instance, that historically we've been good at being swift, decisive, and forthright and in regards to certain aspects of what we do that has been absolutely appropriate. But we're now recognising that some ideas and projects require a longer germination period, or mature more gradually, and that we therefore need to also develop a slower, more contemplative approach to discussing these things in meetings.

And of course, how we conduct the business of the organisation - and meetings are perhaps the primary structure through which we do this - has a direct relationship with the work we produce on stage. It informs the stories we want to tell, who tells them, and how.

Background Statistics

National Theatre

Creative teams and performers from 2011 to 2015



Assistant Directors Female: 50% (5) Male: 50% (5)



Cast Female: 36% (610) Male: 64% (1071)



Casting Directors Female: 85% (88) Male: 15% (15)



Composers Female: 11% (1) Male: 89% (8)



Designers Female: 52% (50) Male: 48% (46)



Directors Female: 27% (26) Male: 73% (70)



Fight Directors Female: 56% (22) Male: 44% (17)



Lighting Designers Female: 15% (15) Male: 85% (83)



Movement Directors Female: 49% (30) Male: 51% (31)



Music Directors Female: 7% (6) Male: 93% (76)



Musicians Female: 40% (49) Male: 60% (74)



Sound Designers Female: 9% (9) Male: 91% (91)



Writers Female: 23% (29) Male: 77% (99)

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

5 KEY INSIGHTS

Five things the Advance 2016 organisations are now thinking about...

+ More

REFLECTIONS

Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on what Advance 2016 set out to change...

+ More

CAST	CLEAN BREAK	MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP	NATIONAL THEATRE	NEW WOLSEY THEATRE	NORTHERN BALLET	NORTHERN STAGE	ROYAL OPERA HOUSE	SADLER'S WELLS
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Profile
New Wolsey Theatre creates, develops and produces a vital and dynamic programme of theatre, live performances and projects for all the people of Suffolk Suffolk and surrounding areas...



Starting Point
We are recognised as a leader in the field of disability and inclusion, and wanted to use the basis of this work, to look at how we could affect the same change in relation to gender equality...

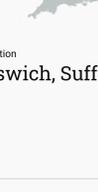
Our Question
“How can we build on what we have learnt and achieved through our work on disability, so that when we make creative decisions we are fully conscious of the need to ensure a mixed gender environment?”

What We Did
We identified a clear underrepresentation of women within our casts and creative teams, developed an action plan to address this, and plan to increase the female narratives and perspectives within the stories told on our stages...

- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Our experience
- + Creative team stats
- + Reflection on the process

Profile Our question What we did What we learned Our experience Background stats Blog



<p>Founded in</p> <h1>2000</h1>	<p>Artistic Director</p> <p>Peter Rowe</p> <p>Since 2000 along with Sarah Holmes, Chief Executive</p>		<p>Profile</p> <p>Our mission is to create, develop and produce a vital and dynamic programme of theatre, and other live performances and projects, for all the people of Suffolk and surrounding areas. We combine our own productions, projects, collaborations with other partners and touring work, to create a programme of performances and creative learning projects of the highest quality, maximum diversity and greatest possible accessibility, within a sound and sustainable financial framework.</p>
 <p>Company Type</p> <p>Building based</p> <p>We tour work and perform in our own building: New Wolsey Theatre (400 capacity), New Wolsey Studio (104 capacity) and High Street Exhibition Gallery (flexible space, approx 80 capacity).</p>	<p>Public Funding</p> <h2>£853,028</h2> <p>Total subsidy from Arts Council England in the 2015/16 financial year</p>	<p>Location</p> <p>Ipswich, Suffolk</p> 	<p>We aim to create a theatre that is welcoming, inclusive and open to all sections of the community. To create work that both satisfies and challenges the theatre's audiences, developing new artists, new work and new ways of working.</p> <p>We offer opportunities to develop theatre and performance skills, particularly to young people and other social and cultural groups who are currently under represented.</p> <p>+ www.wolseytheatre.co.uk</p>
<p>Productions</p> <h1>6</h1> <p>Staged in the 2015/16 financial year</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>25 Core full-time staff</p> <p>9 Core part-time staff</p> <p>4 Associate roles</p> <p>5 Associate companies</p>		

Our Question

How can we build on what we have learnt and achieved through our work on disability, so that when we make creative decisions we are fully conscious of the need to ensure a mixed gender environment?

The New Wolsey Theatre (NWT) has always strived to be at the forefront of creating an environment which is inclusive, diverse and accessible through all aspects of the organisation, as well as aiming to inspire the same principles within the wider sector. NWT's mission is to create a programme of the highest quality, maximum diversity and greatest possible accessibility, and this has been reflected in the theatre's activity, particularly through the NWT's work on disability.

Having established an Agent for Change programme, consisting of auditing the organisations processes and activity, alongside the employment of Agents for Change to help drive this shift in organisational culture, NWT has become a leader in this field, and as the lead partner on the Arts Council funded Ramps on the Moon project, is driving change in the mainstream theatre sector. We therefore wanted to use the basis of this work, to look at how we could affect the same change in relation to gender equality.

WHAT WE DID

"Undertaking the Advance programme with the cohort of other performing arts organisations has provided invaluable sharing, relationship building and acted as a vital sounding board in the development of tools and practices towards a step change, leading to increased gender equality. What struck me from the Advance Away Days, was the clear acknowledgement of this issue within the sector and the collective commitment to implement new practices, despite working and time pressures, to help instigate change.

We have experienced first-hand, through our work to increase the representation of D/deaf and disabled individuals, that true sectoral change takes time, but can begin to be achieved if kept conscious in the minds of organisational decision makers. I hope to see, as a result of this programme, a sustained and increased representation of women across all roles within the sector, to the point where in the longer term, these conversations and initiatives will no longer be needed!"

LORNA OWEN, HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION MANAGER

Investigation

Whilst the statistics of our core workforce display a fairly even gender split (52% male / 48% female), evidence from our gender tracker highlighted a clear underrepresentation of women within NWT's casts and creative teams, as you can see from our statistics.

What We Learned

As part of the Advance programme, Tonic Theatre conducted workshops and interviews with our staff, wider academics and interviews, reading and research online, and gathered academic input to assist in informing our actions going forward. Areas highlighted within Tonic's research as to why there may be a gender imbalance included role models, unconscious bias and the way in which creative decisions are made, in relation to both our creative teams and the work put on the stage.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

As a result of Tonic's findings, NWT has developed an action plan which aims to increase awareness across the whole organisation of questions of gender in ways that will enable incremental and sustainable (ie permanent) change.

Rather than attempting to reach a designated target, instead the aim will be a constant vigilance about what the NWT is 'saying' about gender via the numbers of women it employs (and in which roles), and in the way gender is represented on our stages. Those responsible for NWT's programming and creating of produced work now fill out a 'gender representation analysis' as part of the programming process – a questionnaire attached to a database allowing comparison of the representation of women in shows not only in terms of numbers participating in creative roles, but also how women are represented on stage. Using this tool, NWT plans to increase the female narratives and perspectives within the stories told on our stages.

In addition, we are also aiming to increase women within the creative teams and casts for NWT productions, benchmarked against baseline figures from the gender tracker. The gender tracker will be maintained and, as improvement is seen, the new figures will be taken as the new baseline, against which future success will be measured. This we hope will enable continuous shift, and prevent a slow-down once some change has occurred. Alongside this, NWT will also provide unconscious bias training to all staff in order to help promote more informed decision making.

PETER ROWE, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

"Like a healthy lifestyle, a healthy gender balance is something you're convinced you're pursuing until someone shows you a picture of yourself. It is easy to believe that we are naturally open and accessible organisations until the evidence proves otherwise. In our case, the investigation into this systemic imbalance has led through questions of choice of creative personnel and recruitment towards an investigation into the stories we tell and the meanings they explicitly, or implicitly, contain.

It has been really instructive to work with other organisations through this process – to share ideas, insights and examples of good practice. Most important though has been the solidarity gained simply from sister organisations prepared to face the unacceptable current situation, open up the facts of their own practice to each other and affirm a determination to change.

For myself the Advance programme has made it clear that, like other forms of bias or inaccessibility, gender imbalance is systemic within our industry and the solution needs to be systemic too – an incremental but irreversible improvement in those pie charts is what we must achieve. Amongst all the other pressures on planning and programming it can be easy, or convenient, for questions of gender balance to be squeezed aside. The great benefit of the Advance programme has been that it feels we are now part of a growing movement determined to change that."

Background Statistics

New Wolsey Theatre

Creative teams and performers for in-house and co-productions from 2011 to 2015



ZOE SVENDSEN, ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE

"What has felt particularly exciting about the structure of Advance, is the way that it has made it feel thoroughly legitimate to be concerned about the systemic inequalities that mean that despite being 50% of the population, women are too frequently far fewer in number when it comes to positions of power, both on stage and off.

There is further the odd, and difficult-to-quantify, situation that a play may well have female characters in it, but they are ciphers for telling a story from the perspective of someone who happens to be male. Thus even when female characters are present, women can remain underrepresented. Further, different performance genres have different demands in terms of realism or social plausibility, so the form that the imbalance might take is different. Similarly challenging is that we are used to thinking about access for audiences, and that is expressly not what is at issue here – the New Wolsey is I am sure not alone in attracting a significant female audience. But a female audience does not necessarily translate into demand for female-led stories. Raising the question of unconscious bias was therefore important, and equally, that being female is no guarantee of being able to articulate, much less address, these disparities, either.

Being able to address these complex questions in a large group of men and women with very different perspectives but equal levels of commitment to tackling the issue, meant the work felt creative and productive: not just about redressing a wrong, but about provoking us all to be more creative and dextrous in our representation of human experience."

WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

5 KEY INSIGHTS

Five things the Advance 2016 organisations are now thinking about...

REFLECTIONS

Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on what Advance 2016 set out to change...

+ More



Our Question

“Why do we see fewer female choreographers of classical ballet than men and how can we ensure that the girls and young women who dance with us are aware that choreography is an option for them and have the opportunity to engage with it?”

Profile

Northern Ballet is a powerhouse of inventive dance. Bold and confident in our approach, we engage, involve and move our audiences...



Starting Point

We were concerned at the lack of women coming forward to choreograph classical and narrative led ballet. We wanted to do something concrete to investigate the situation and look at what action could be taken to effect change...

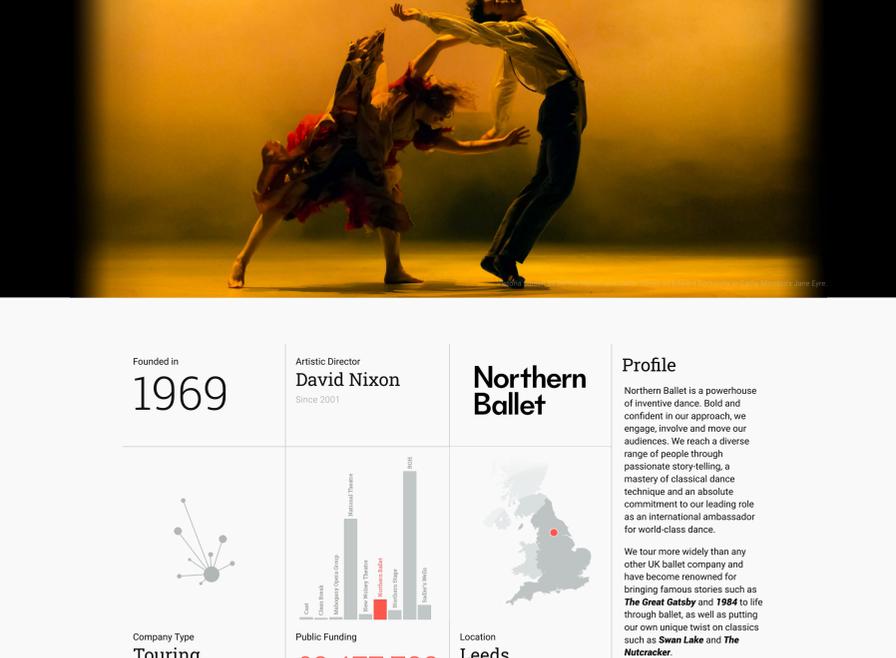


What We Did

In focus groups, workshops and one to one interviews Tonic spoke to practising choreographers, women and men, about why fewer women are working in the field...



- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Our experience
- + Creative team stats



<p>Founded in</p> <h1>1969</h1>	<p>Artistic Director</p> <h2>David Nixon</h2> <p>Since 2001</p>	<h1>Northern Ballet</h1>	<h3>Profile</h3> <p>Northern Ballet is a powerhouse of inventive dance. Bold and confident in our approach, we engage, involve and move our audiences. We teach a diverse range of people through passionate story-telling, a mastery of classical dance technique and an absolute commitment to our leading role as an international ambassador for world-class dance.</p> <p>We tour more widely than any other UK ballet company and have become renowned for bringing famous stories such as <i>The Great Gatsby</i> and <i>1984</i> to life through ballet, as well as putting our own unique twist on classics such as <i>Swan Lake</i> and <i>The Nutcracker</i>.</p> <p>The Academy of Northern Ballet provides world-class, non-residential dance training to all ages and abilities. The Academy is the only recognised Centre for Advanced Training (CAT) specialising in Classical Ballet in the UK.</p> <p>+ northernballet.com</p>
<p>Company Type</p> <h3>Touring</h3> <p>We tour, work and perform in our own building. Our studio theatre holds up to 195 people.</p>	<p>Public Funding</p> <h2>£3,477,788</h2> <p>Total subsidy from Arts Council England in the 2015/16 financial year</p>	<p>Location</p> <h3>Leeds</h3>	
<p>Productions</p> <h1>12</h1> <p>Staged in the 2015/16 financial year</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>101 Core full-time staff</p> <p>11 Core part-time staff</p> <p>47 Associate roles</p>		

Our Question

Why do we see fewer female choreographers of classical ballet than men and how can we ensure that the girls and young women who dance with us are aware that choreography is an option for them and have the opportunity to engage with it?

We were concerned at the lack of women coming forward to choreograph classical and narrative led ballet. We wanted to do something concrete to investigate the situation and look at what action could be taken to effect change.

WHAT WE DID

Tonic spoke to practising choreographers, women and men, about why fewer women are working in the field.

Through focus groups, Tonic gathered observations from our trainee dancers and ballet company members as well as company members of *The Royal Ballet*. Through workshops and one to one interviews, they met with a wide range of staff at Northern Ballet, including those who lead our Academy training programmes. Tonic also discussed our question with staff at *The Royal Ballet*, the *Royal Ballet School* and *Sadler's Wells*.

“The work with Tonic has been thorough in exposing the extent of gender inequality in general as well as its surprising and persistent prevalence in the Arts Sector. I have come to appreciate the fact that the sector carries responsibility to lead by example and inspire change. After taking part in the discussions I can honestly say this consideration will be at the forefront of my mind from now on.”
Daniel de Andrade, Artistic Associate, Northern Ballet

What We Learned

We thought the lack of women coming forward might be driven by a simple lack of interest, but learned that a complexity of factors contribute to fewer women than men moving into the choreography of classical ballet.

We understand that the route to choreography is somewhat different for women and men, though both progress through ballet school together and are offered the same opportunities to engage with choreography.

The majority of young dancers are female. Because there are fewer boys, they tend to be encouraged through the system, whereas the girls function in an extremely competitive environment – only a few of them can make it. In this environment, girls and then women focus on becoming the very best dancer they can be, applying themselves wholly and conscientiously to the training, with little of no time for thinking about or developing a choreographic voice. Boys and then men have a degree more slack available to them and perhaps because of this are more willing to take the risk of throwing themselves into choreographic opportunities when they arise.

Also, historically, and it is still the case today, for a girl to take up ballet is common place. For a boy to do the same is to break with convention. He may grow tough through encounters with bullying outside his training; he may grow confident through proactive and consistent encouragement within training. These circumstances may mean that boys and then men move more easily towards choreography, a practice in which the individual must assert their ideas and take a lead.

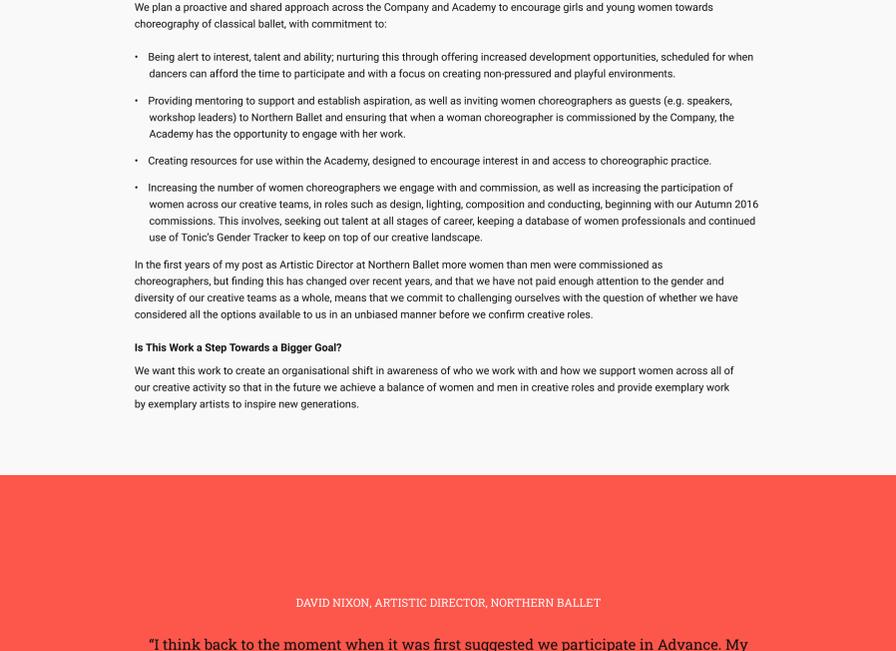
We learned that in Ballet, across art forms and in society there is evidence that girls become more self-conscious and less outwardly expressive than boys in their teenage years. Self consciousness combined with anxiety about succeeding as a dancer may contribute to a lack of desire amongst girls to ‘put themselves out there’ or have a go’ when it comes to choreography.

Focus groups struggled to name female choreographers of classical ballet. This underlined for us the lack of available role models for girls and young women. We also heard that in some cases, young women find it difficult to imagine themselves as the manipulator, belonging to a tradition described by George Balanchine in the following way.

Ballet is a female thing. It is a woman, a garden of beautiful flowers and the man is the gardener.

However, interviews and focus groups revealed that there is a strong interest amongst girls and women in choreographing classical ballet and a belief that engagement with choreography, if managed well, provides creative stimulation, refreshment and an experience which stretches and improves a dancer's ability. Some expressed interest in working with a more contemporary, abstract language and spoke of an inclination towards operating in a more experimental world where there is less emphasis on getting something ‘right’ or ‘correct’. However, there was as much interest in working within the classical tradition (often from the same interviewee or contributor) and excitement at the idea of working on a large scale, re-interpreting and creating new narrative ballet. The Advance process made us much more aware at Northern Ballet of the interests, experiences and needs of the girls and women that train and work with us and got us thinking about new approaches we might adopt to encourage women towards choreography.

We also learned that if a young woman is considering becoming a professional choreographer, that moment of transition, from dancer to choreographer can be delicate and needs support. The transition is often made in a dancer's 20s or 30s when pressures such as finance and family begin to have influence and these pressures continue to feature as a choreographer builds a career, for example we heard about how many women, due to caring responsibilities, need to work part-time, or for a portion of the year, and struggle with the perception that this somehow makes their practice less professional. So, considerations around how to support and develop creative voice, alongside how to offer structured opportunities and finance, which help build and sustain careers, need to be kept in view.



WHAT WE'RE DOING IN RESPONSE TO WHAT WE LEARNED

We have devised an Action Plan which takes steps towards addressing what we learned. It feeds into our Equal Opportunities Policy and forms a part of our work on Creative Diversity. A working group has been established to monitor progress.

We plan a proactive and shared approach across the Company and Academy to encourage girls and young women towards choreography of classical ballet, with commitment to:

- Being alert to interest, talent and ability; nurturing this through offering increased development opportunities, scheduled for when dancers can afford the time to participate and with a focus on creating non-pressured and playful environments.
- Providing mentoring to support and establish aspiration, as well as inviting women choreographers as guests (e.g. speakers, workshop leaders) to Northern Ballet and ensuring that when a woman choreographer is commissioned by the Company, the Academy has the opportunity to engage with her work.
- Creating resources for use within the Academy, designed to encourage interest in and access to choreographic practice.
- Increasing the number of women choreographers we engage with and commission, as well as increasing the participation of women across our creative teams, in roles such as design, lighting, composition and conducting, beginning with our Autumn 2016 commissions. This involves, seeking out talent at all stages of career, keeping a database of women professionals and continued use of Tonic's Gender Tracker to keep on top of our creative landscape.

In the first years of my post as Artistic Director at Northern Ballet more women than men were commissioned as choreographers, but finding this has changed over recent years, and that we have not paid enough attention to the gender and diversity of our creative teams as a whole, means that we commit to challenging ourselves with the question of whether we have considered all the options available to us in an unbiased manner before we confirm creative roles.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

We want this work to create an organisational shift in awareness of who we work with and how we support women across all of our creative activity so that in the future we achieve a balance of women and men in creative roles and provide exemplary work by exemplary artists to inspire new generations.

DAVID NIXON, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, NORTHERN BALLET

“I think back to the moment when it was first suggested we participate in Advance. My initial response was, why would we need to participate, what would we gain? We are a ballet company where most often there is a balance of gender and sometimes more women than men. However, I was very wrong about what I could learn, what I would end up reflecting upon and appreciating.

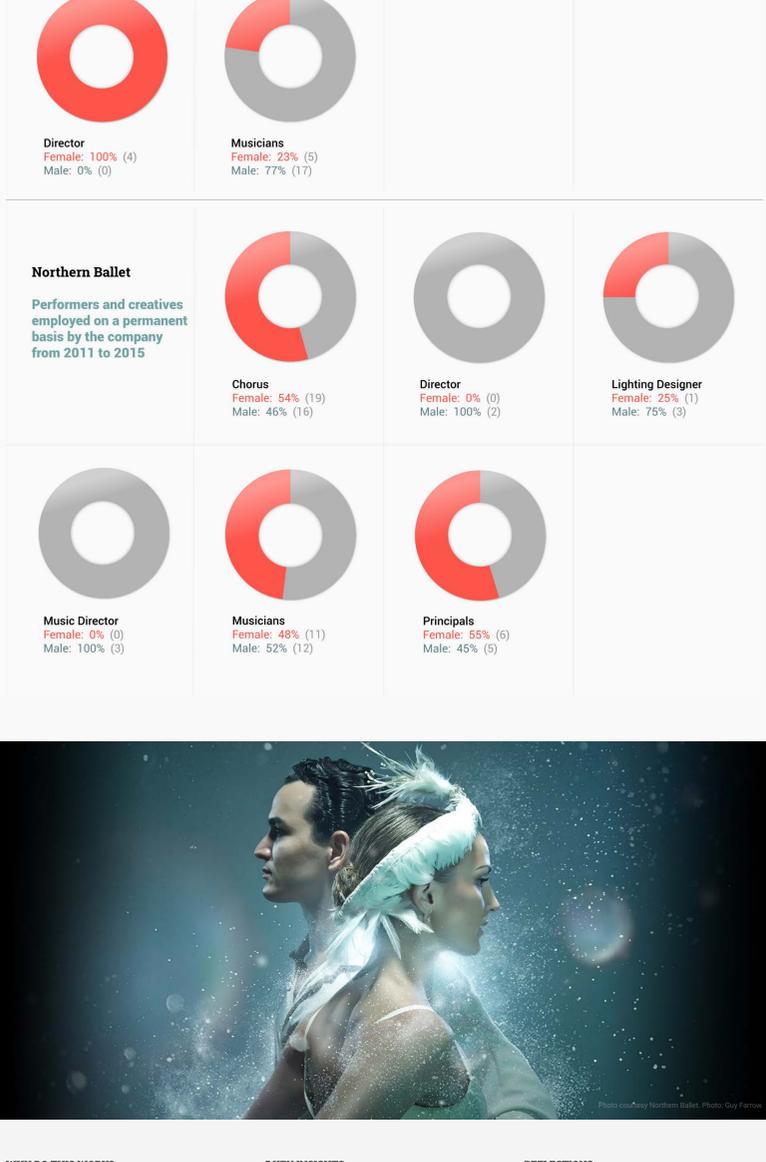
It was energising and often enlightening to go through the process as part of a cohort – a wonderful group of different thinking individuals who brought a range of thoughts, experiences and entry points to discussions.

I am not used to attending the kinds of Away Days Tonic organised for the group, but I found them simultaneously inspiring and challenging. I think my upbringing has produced some naivety in me regarding issues such as gender equality. I have always seen women as equals and have taken that to be the norm, but the Away Day conversations painted a different picture which disappointed and yet inspired me to be proactive, to wake up.

A discussion on unconscious bias had a big impact on me personally. Though I knew we all have prejudices it was not until after this session I understood unconscious bias, its consequences and the need for action to counter it with such clarity. It made me look at work relationships differently and think about my decision-making more. I am someone who needs time to reflect and consider, and the session on unconscious bias strengthened my inclination towards taking time and not acting too quickly just to tick a job as done.

Most beneficial was time spent speaking to and listening to Vicky from Tonic and Daniel my Artistic Associate who participated with me on this project. I learned a great deal and felt empowered to act. It was wonderful to see how many people from Northern Ballet were interested in and able to participate in discussions – the work crossed all departments and genders and was positively embraced.”

Background Statistics





Our Question

“What are the specific needs of small, female-led, non-NPO companies in relation to sustainability and growth that can be met by a regional producing house?”

Profile

Northern Stage creates and presents stylish, imaginative and accessible theatrical experiences of international quality and ambition...



Starting Point

We wanted to better understand the barriers to sustainability and growth for small, female-led companies...



What We Did

We held a workshop session for a number of female-led artists and companies based in the North East, through which we began to unpick some of the issues that they face with regard to sustainability and growth...



- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Watch video interview
- + Creative team stats



Cyrbno de Bergnac at Northern Stage. Photo: Mark Savage.

<p>Founded in 1970</p>	<p>Artistic Director Lorne Campbell Since 2013</p>	
<p>Company Type Building based</p> <p>We tour work and perform in our own building. Stage 1 (449 seats), Stage 2 (160 seats), Stage 3 (90 seats).</p>	<p>Public Funding £1,562,496</p> <p>Total subsidy from Arts Council England in the 2015/16 financial year</p>	<p>Location Newcastle</p>
<p>Productions 7</p> <p>Staged in the 2015/16 financial year</p>	<p>Staff 30 Core full-time staff</p> <p>6 Core part-time staff</p> <p>0 Associate roles</p>	<p>Profile</p> <p>Northern Stage creates and presents stylish, imaginative and accessible theatrical experiences of international quality and ambition. From our home in Newcastle upon Tyne we present a performance programme of classic and contemporary drama, dance and comedy across three stages. Each year we produce 7-8 in-house productions, co-productions and tours, and present the best in local, national and international touring theatre on the small- and mid-scale.</p> <p>Over the last four years we have developed an innovative artist development programme, supporting a diverse range of artists to create ambitious and adventurous theatre. We are increasingly working in co-production or in association with these artists to produce, present and promote their work in Newcastle and beyond. Each summer we run a venue at the Edinburgh Festival, supporting artists from across the region to present and promote their work at the largest arts festival in the world.</p> <p>Northern Stage strives to be at the forefront of re-imagining the possibilities of what a 21st century regional producing theatre can be, and we take a considerable strategic and developmental responsibility for artists and companies from within our region.</p> <p>+ www.northernstage.co.uk</p>

Our Question

What are the specific needs of small, female-led, non-NPO* companies in relation to sustainability and growth that can be met by a regional producing house?

Northern Stage has developed a successful and robust programme of artist development for both emerging and established companies within the North East. We recognized, however, that our contributions towards the creative development of mid-career companies in the North East – most of whom are female-led – did not appear to fully address the operational issues they were facing, and that many companies would get to a certain level of profile within the industry before appearing to plateau. We were interested in better understanding what the barriers to sustainability and growth were for these female-led, mid-career artists and companies, and how we might use the resources of a regional producing house to address them.

* National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) are those in receipt of core funding from Arts Council England, for the period April 2015 to March 2018

WHAT WE DID

“Working on Tonic Advance confirmed many of the observations we had about business planning and development within the independent sector, but also challenged many of the underlying assumptions we had about why this situation existed. The opportunity to listen and reflect – not only on our own area of focus but also the experiences of colleagues in the cohort – was invaluable in helping us to develop an appropriate response to the challenge we set ourselves.”

Investigation

We held a workshop session for a number of female-led artists and companies based in the North East, through which we began to unpick some of the issues that they face with regard to sustainability and growth. This workshop session was followed up with interviews with these participants, and other artists and companies from beyond the region. The research identified a number of headline needs shared by mid-career artists, and in separating actual from perceived needs, the research has enabled us to develop a response that we hope will have real impact. It has also identified opportunities for Northern Stage to develop ways of working more collaboratively, by identifying needs of Northern Stage that can be met by those artists.

What We Learned

We discovered that many female-led non-NPOs in the North East had made purposeful decisions to work in the independent sector, as it was felt to be liberating artistically, personally and politically. However, an unhealthy culture had developed (both within the North East and beyond) of small/independent companies being encouraged to view Grants for the Arts as a primary source of income, rather than a part of a mixed funding model. This made them financially fragile: they had few assets to rely on, minimal reserves, little contingency, and were vulnerable to unfavourable decisions. Working within independent organizational structures meant that they rarely got to see how other people ran their companies or planned for growth and sustainability, and they ran the risk of becoming isolated in a narrow frame of reference.

We also recognised that Northern Stage's own artist development schemes had been focusing on development of the creative work, and there had been little investment in proper business planning to support the structures underpinning the art. While we were trying to encourage artists and companies to think in a long-term, strategic manner about their future, we were not providing the skills to be able to deliver this approach.

What We're Doing in Response to What We Learned

We plan to introduce a strand of our artistic development activity that is focused towards supporting the organizational development of companies in our region. We will work with female-led companies to identify skills and common interest in delivering projects with Northern Stage, to develop more sustainable income streams. We also intend to collaborate with Newcastle University to facilitate access to business planning support and expertise.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

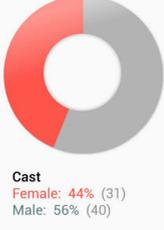
Northern Stage is the largest producing theatre in the North East, and as such we feel a keen responsibility for the theatrical eco-system in our region. We want to identify ways for the organization's resources to be at the service of audiences and artists in the North East, supporting the growth and sustainability of the sector. Over time we would like to develop many more opportunities for integration of our own activity with the ambitions of artists in our region.



Background Statistics

Northern Stage

Creatives and Co-producers, in-house and co-productions 2015-2016



WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

+ More

5 KEY INSIGHTS

Five things the Advance 2016 organisations are now thinking about...

+ More

REFLECTIONS

Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on what Advance 2016 set out to change...

+ More



Our Question

“Why is it that such a small proportion of the conductors we employ are women? What can the Royal Opera House do to increase the number of women conductors working in opera and ballet?”

Profile

The Royal Opera House aims to enrich people's lives through opera and ballet. We are home to two of the world's great artistic companies – The Royal Opera and The Royal Ballet...



Starting Point

We were aware that the proportion of our conductors who were women was low across the range of our work and we wanted to understand the obstacles which were preventing us from working with more women...

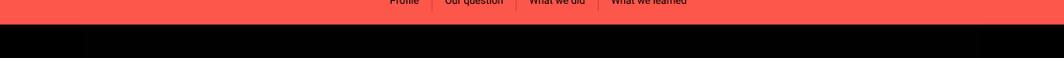


What We Did

We looked carefully at our own operations and began to identify how existing approaches, structures and activities could be developed – with partners across the sector – to support women better...



- + What we did
- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently



Alice Farnham made her ROH debut in 2008 and most recently conducted *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* in the Linbury Studio in 2015. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.

Founded in

1858

Theatre Royal (became the Royal Opera House)

1931

Vic-Wells Ballet (became The Royal Ballet)

1946

Covent Garden Opera Company (became The Royal Opera)

For The Royal Ballet

Kevin O'Hare

Director

Koen Kessels

Music Director

For The Royal Opera

Kasper Holten

Director

John Fulljames

Associate Director

Antonio Pappano

Music Director

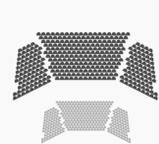


Profile

The Royal Opera House aims to enrich people's lives through opera and ballet. Home to two of the world's great artistic companies – The Royal Opera and The Royal Ballet, performing with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House – we seek to be always accessible and engaging, and to break new ground in the presentation of lyric theatre.

We are one of the busiest theatres in the world, presenting more than 500 performances and 1,000 learning and participation sessions each year and attracting 1.5m attendances across Covent Garden and in cinemas worldwide, further extended via broadcasting, digital activity and collaboration with touring companies. An estimated 24,794 people took part in creative projects, in addition we connected tens of thousands more young people with arts and culture at our second home in Thurrock and as a 'Bridge' organisation in the East of England.

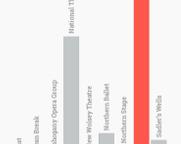
+ www.roh.org.uk



Company Type

Building based

Our grade 1 listed Covent Garden theatre includes a 2,000 seat auditorium and the smaller Linbury Theatre (394 seats, currently being renovated), complemented by set production, costume and learning facilities in Purfleet, Thurrock.



Public Investment

£25.8m

Arts Council England National Portfolio and Bridge investment for the 2014/15 financial year



Location

Covent Garden, London

Productions

50

Staged in the 2015/16 financial year, including 21 works by visiting companies

Staff

866 Core full-time staff



199 Core part-time staff



2,916 Associate roles



Artists of The Royal Ballet in Aeternum. © ROH / Bill Cooper, 2014

Our Question

Why is it that such a small proportion of the conductors we employ are women? What can the Royal Opera House do to increase the number of women conductors working in opera and ballet?

Across the whole range of our work from opera to ballet, from large-scale to small-scale, we are asking ourselves how we can enrich the diversity of our creative work. We want to nurture the widest possible range of artists and ideas and believe that this will enable us to make the best possible work. We work with a large number of conductors in a very wide-range of contexts; from conducting the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House on our main-stage to conducting small-scale participatory projects around the country. We were aware that the proportion of our conductors who were women was low across the range of our work and we wanted to understand the obstacles which were preventing us from working with more women. What was it about our systems, processes and biases which was preventing us from working with more women? And how could we make a positive impact, not only to strengthen our programmes by working with more women, but also to strengthen the pool of available female conducting talent?

WHAT WE DID

The process began with a workshop, led by Tonic, involving staff from across our Opera, Ballet and Orchestra companies in the question of why so few women conductors are employed at The Royal Opera House.

Following that, Tonic interviewed members of staff, including Kasper Holten, Director of Opera, John Fulljames, Associate Director of Opera, Peter Katona, Director of Casting, David Syrus, Head of Music, Sarah Crabtree, Senior Producer (Opera), Kate Hodson, Learning and Participation Manager (Opera), Kevin O'Hare, Director of The Royal Ballet, Koen Kessels, Music Director of the Royal Ballet, Emma Southworth, Senior Producer of The Royal Ballet's Studio Programme, Rachel Hollings, Artistic Administrator of The Royal Ballet, Sally Mitchell, Orchestra Administrative Director and David Gowland, Artistic Director of the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme, asking for views on the question and exploring the way we work.

We looked into women's experience of beginning, building and sustaining a career in conducting. Tonic held one to one interviews with women conductors who have worked with us over the years and some who haven't. Tonic also spoke to the Royal Academy of Music and Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and observed and surveyed attendees of the Morley College Women Conductors workshops for ballet and opera, hosted at the Royal Opera House in 2016.

Further information was gathered from reading on and offline and augmented by input from Christina Scharff, Senior Lecturer in the department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries at Kings College London, author of Equality & Diversity in the Classical Music Profession and whose current research interest is Music, Gender & Entrepreneurialism, and Tonic's academic partners, Central School of Speech and Drama.

Insights from the research were fed back to Royal Opera House staff through a series of meetings with a working group dedicated to the Advance project. Following discussion of insights we looked carefully at our own operations and began to identify how existing approaches, structures and activities could be developed – with partners across the sector – to support women better.

"We were aware that representation of women amongst the conductors we work with was low. Tonic's tool for gender tracking confirmed that this was so. We are committed to continued use of the tool for tracking the gender of conductors we engage and work with, as well as those employed in creative roles across Royal Opera and Royal Ballet productions."

WHAT WE LEARNED

Women take many different routes into and through the profession. Many are 'late starters', often due to lack of encouragement earlier in life. Some will come to conducting after working successfully and extensively as coaches and répétiteurs, while others will build a career gradually over many years, taking career breaks and in some cases actively avoiding high risk opportunities for rapid ascension to elite circles.

Lack of visibility can impact on aspiration and ambition in girls and young women and on the experience of women operating in the profession. Seeing someone of the same gender ahead of you helps send the idea that the profession is for you, while being aware of others alongside you is empowering and prevents energy going on management of the 'curiosity factor' of being a woman.

Conductors work in a highly competitive environment, where the pressure of audition and having just one chance in front of an orchestra can weigh heavily. Confidence levels, coupled with cognisance of bringing something different to a profession traditionally occupied by men, can affect performance. Equally, unconscious bias in the face of difference can play a part in how performance is assessed.

Managing a freelance career alongside pressures of, for example, finance (especially in London) and family commitments (international engagements can be particularly difficult to manage while raising a family) can be extremely challenging. One-off opportunities and the reliance on freelancers to take continuous initiative doesn't ease the situation. If a freelancer isn't able to see a clear pathway ahead she, or he, might decide the profession is too difficult to navigate and find an alternative occupation.

A growing number of women are coming into conducting and increasingly organisations are paying attention to supporting their development, for example the Dallas Opera through its Institute for Women Conductors, signalling an exciting shift in the industry.

WHAT WE'RE DOING IN RESPONSE TO WHAT WE LEARNED

The Royal Opera House is planning to:

- Create clearer pathways to and through the conducting profession by partnering with schools, conservatoires and peer companies to strengthen and join up talent development pipelines.
- Strengthen its scouting processes to identify female talent at every level, nationally and internationally, increasing the number of women conductors whose work is being assessed and monitored.
- Develop the best possible environment for women conductors to thrive in, paying particular attention to their development needs.
- Increase the visibility of the female conductors who are working with the company.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?

This is a first step towards the development of a talent pool which has as many experienced and established female conductors as male conductors and in which both are equally represented on our podiums.

The project has also contributed to the way we think about increasing the diversity of our work across the board; for example it has sparked a conversation about how we can better foster creative environments across artistic disciplines in which leading women can thrive.

"Opera needs to pull on the widest possible pool of artists if it is to find the very best future talent. I'd very much like to see more women working at the Royal Opera House at all levels – not only coming up through our young artist programmes but also appearing regularly on all our podiums."

Sir. Antonio Pappano, Music Director, The Royal Opera



Amanda Fortynne as Lenora in *Orphée et Eurydice*. ©ROH. Photographed by Bill Cooper.

WHY DO THIS WORK?

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+ More

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Five things the Advance 2015 organisations are now thinking about...

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REFLECTIONS

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+ More



Our Question

“What challenges can women encounter in building and sustaining a career in choreography? How might Sadler's Wells tailor its working processes to support the development of women's careers better?”

Profile

Sadler's Wells is a world-leading dance house, committed to producing, commissioning and presenting new works and to bringing the best international and UK dance to London and worldwide audiences.

Starting Point

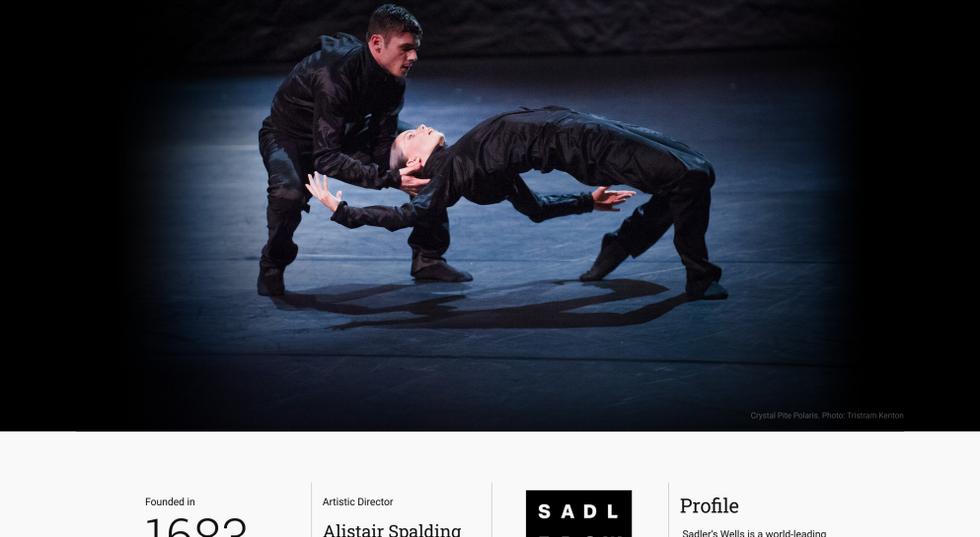
We were aware of a decrease in the number of women choreographers transitioning from emerging or mid-career to established artist...

What We Did

We carried out a wide-ranging investigation and developed an Action Plan, which contains first steps towards our ambition of achieving greater gender equality on Sadler's Wells stages...

- + What we learned
- + What we're doing differently
- + Watch video interview
- + Choreographer stats

Profile Our question What we did What we learned Our response Video Background stats



Crystal Pina Polaris, Photo: Tristan Kenton

Founded in

1683

Sadler's Wells has been presenting theatrical productions in Rosebery Avenue, Islington for over 300 years.

Artistic Director

Alistair Spalding

Since 2004

Company Type

Building based

We present work in our buildings and commission, produce and tour our productions. Three auditoriums: Sadler's Wells' main stage, 1,500 seats, and Lilian Baylis Studio, 180 seats, in Islington, north London; and The Peacock, a 1,000-seat theatre in London's West End.

Public Funding

£2,456,000

Arts Council England subsidy for 2015-16 (9% of annual income)

Location

Islington, north London

Productions

91

Staged in the 2015-16 financial year. Of these, 33 were produced, co-commissioned, or co-produced by Sadler's Wells.

Staff

122 Core full-time staff

64 Core part-time staff

16 Associate roles

6 Associate companies*

* 16 Associate Artists; 3 Resident Companies; 3 Associate Companies

Profile

Sadler's Wells is a world-leading dance house, committed to producing, commissioning and presenting new works and to bringing the best international and UK dance to London and worldwide audiences.

The theatre's acclaimed year-round programme spans dance of every kind, from contemporary to flamenco, Bollywood, ballet, salsa, street dance and tango. Since 2005, it has helped to bring over 100 new dance works to the stage and its award-winning commissions and collaborative productions regularly tour in the UK and overseas.

Sadler's Wells supports 16 Associate Artists, three Resident Companies, an Associate Company and two International Associate Companies. It nurtures the next generation of talent through research and development, running the National Youth Dance Company and a range of programmes including Wild Card, New Wave Associates, Open Art Surgery and Summer University.

Sadler's Wells' community, schools and learning programmes offer access to dance and opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to take part in high-quality productions and learning activities, both on and off the stage.

Located in Islington, north London, the current theatre is the sixth to have stood on the site since it was first built by Richard Sadler in 1683. The venue has played an illustrious role in the history of theatre ever since, with The Royal Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet and English National Opera all having started at Sadler's Wells.

+ www.sadlerwells.com

Our Question

What challenges can women encounter in building and sustaining a career in choreography? How might Sadler's Wells tailor its working processes to support the development of women's careers better?

Sadler's Wells aims to stimulate people's enjoyment of dance and their understanding of it, and to develop the art form by supporting artists and the creation of new work. We want to ensure dance continues to reflect and shape the way we think about the world, and to reach an ever wider public. We were aware of a decrease in the number of women choreographers transitioning from emerging or mid-career to established artist. Understanding the issues preventing a greater number of women from creating dance work therefore became one of our priorities.

WHAT WE DID

In 2015, we held a private roundtable discussion with a group of women choreographers we support in order to discuss the challenges they face and how Sadler's Wells might help them to overcome these. Taking part in the Advance programme was the ideal vehicle through which to deepen and further our inquiry, and progress our commitment to support women better.

In collaboration with us, Tonic carried out a wide-ranging investigation that included discussions with staff members responsible for artist development and programming decisions; conversations with women dance producers; one-to-one interviews with 18 women choreographers and a focus group with four women choreographers, at all stages of career and across a range of different artistic practices.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The investigation highlighted a number of areas that can present challenges for women choreographers.

Although the experiences and career paths of the women consulted varied, these findings reflect the themes that emerged most recurrently in the conversations held.

- **The development of creative voice and sense of authorship**
Tonic's investigation found that most girls enter the dance world through ballet school or some kind of formal dance training. The journey towards becoming a professional dancer, from which one would typically become a choreographer, is a very competitive one. Conscientiousness in training, coupled with self-consciousness in the teenage years, appears to result in some girls becoming less assertive. Their creative voice can become hidden or submerged. As there are fewer boys than girls in training, boys tend to receive proactive attention in order to encourage them through to a professional level. Without such proactive attention, girls' creative abilities can go unnoticed or unattended – see [Northern Ballet's page](#) for more on this. This set of circumstances is likely to feed into the way some women present themselves as choreographers and the way they author work. Women may not push themselves forward as readily as men, and some may tend towards making work that is collaborative and participatory, without necessarily foregrounding themselves as artists and authors. This can lead to the artist and the work missing out on the attention it might deserve.
- **The role of arts organisations in taste-making**
Some of the women consulted felt that funders, producers and venues could widen their lens further, to seek out and look in expanded ways at a wider spectrum of artistic practices, as well as be considerate to artists at all stages of career. In particular, the investigation highlighted that some types of artistic practice favoured by women dance makers seem to be less attractive to arts organisations. These include choreographic work that involves working away from a theatre stage or which questions format (e.g. may be made outdoors or in other contexts), as well as practices involving collaborative authorship and more process-led work. Those works appear to be programmed less frequently than work that bears strong singular authorship and is more readily made for the stage and traditional modes of presentation.
- **The necessity and challenge of managing multiple roles as artist, producer and administrator, especially if working outside established structures**
The investigation found that emerging and mid-career women choreographers frequently find themselves working with little funding, from project to project and outside of established structures. It can be challenging to engage a producer and/ or administrator in this situation; instead, women tend to take on the work themselves. The perception is that men are less likely to find themselves in this position, and/ or are less willing to take on administrative tasks. While it appears men are more likely to find their way into an established structure, many women find themselves operating in the middle ground for a prolonged period of time, eligible for only small-scale, time-limited project grants without access to more sustained, larger-scale, mid-career development opportunities.
- **The experience of being offered fewer and lesser opportunities than men**
In a tight funding environment, some women commented on having been advised to keep work and ambition small as a way to continue practicing, and felt that such advice would be less likely given to a man. Some women spoke about delivering more activity for the same statutory funding as their male peers and there was a common feeling that, overall, producers are offering women smaller stages, shorter runs, smaller budgets, less marketing and press, and therefore less audience and profile.
- **The challenge of managing family, personal and financial circumstances**
Starting a family often coincides with the point at which a career is ready to mature. The desire and need to progress has to be balanced with managing challenges such as the costs of childcare, long rehearsal days, travel and time away from home. Other factors such as caring for elderly parents or the impact of ageing or ill health also need to be managed, and financing a life through a career in choreography can be challenging at every level of practice.

WHAT WE'RE DOING IN RESPONSE

We have developed an Action Plan, which contains first steps towards our ambition of achieving greater gender equality on Sadler's Wells stages.

We understand and embrace our planning as a phased and open-ended process, which we will review and refine regularly as we move forward. Our plan is structured around the following areas.

- **Information Gathering**
We have developed Tonic's gender tracker to capture the number of women and men we commission, produce and present on each of our stages, separately, so that we can monitor these figures in a systematic way and check our progress with each platform. We are also developing a more systematic way of building and sharing knowledge with choreographers and dance curators through our organisation.
- **More Opportunities**
Sadler's Wells staff with responsibility for commissioning and artist development will make use of the information we gather as they make curatorial decisions and we are paying immediate attention to how to offer a greater number of opportunities to women choreographers in a more proactive way. We are looking at employing structures where longer-term support, including financial, is available – as we already offer through our Summer University, which supports artists over four years. A key project for Sadler's Wells in the next five years is the development of a new venue in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, east London. This will increase the number of artists and the work we can present, allowing us to offer women a mid-scale platform, together with mid-career development opportunities.
- **Sector**
We commit to working even harder, individually and together with colleagues in the dance sector, to widen and strengthen the pipeline of creative female talent in dance. As we plan for our new venue in the Olympic Park, we are working with colleagues in east London to ensure that we provide a connected offer.
- **Workplace Culture**
As a result of taking part in Advance, we have interrogated our decision-making on more than just the subject of gender. To see change happen you have to dig deep into the culture of an organisation and, as part of a commitment to change, we have included unconscious bias training in our new equality, diversity and inclusion training at Sadler's Wells.

Is This Work a Step Towards a Bigger Goal?
Yes, it is. Our long-term goal is to achieve a more even gender balance in the choreography we present on all of our stages. We aim to achieve a measurable shift in the number of women choreographers, perspectives and narratives we present and to inspire and affect positive and lasting change at Sadler's Wells and in the wider cultural sector.

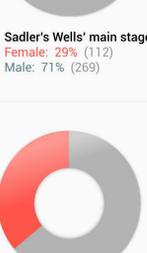
Sadler's Wells: Alistair Spalding CBE, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Sadler's Wells, in conversation with Eva Martinez, Artistic Programmer and Artist Development, Sadler's Wells, about the experience of participating in Advance.



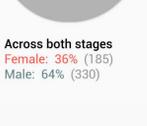
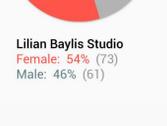
Background Statistics

Sadler's Wells

Choreographers of all productions commissioned, produced and presented from start of 2013 to end of 2016



"While over 54% of the work programmed in the Lilian Baylis Studio, where we present emerging and early-career dance artists, is by women choreographers, on our main stage, where we present established artists, around 30% of work is by women dance makers. Our ambition is that, through supporting women better, we will achieve a measurable shift in the number of women choreographers transitioning from emerging to established artists, and presenting work on our main stage."



WHY DO THIS WORK?

The answer's simple; things are still far from equal in the theatre industry...

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5 KEY INSIGHTS

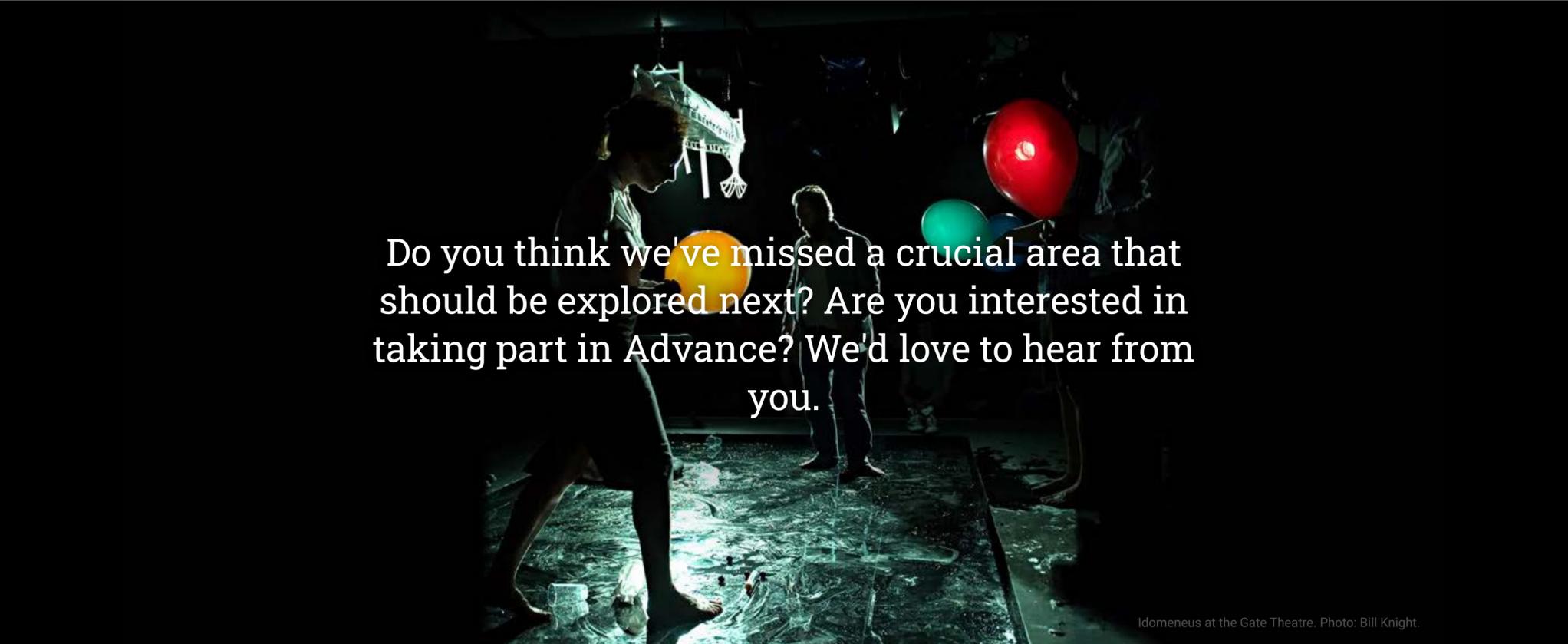
Five things that Advance 2016 organisations are now thinking about...

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REFLECTIONS

Tonic's Lucy Kerbel and Vicky Long reflect on what Advance 2016 set out to change...

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Do you think we've missed a crucial area that should be explored next? Are you interested in taking part in Advance? We'd love to hear from you.

Idomeneus at the Gate Theatre. Photo: Bill Knight.

CONTACT US

Do you think we've missed a crucial area that should be explored next?

Are you based in a performing arts organisation (or perhaps elsewhere in the arts or creative industries) and want to express your interest in taking part in future cycles of Advance? Or have ideas for what, beyond gender equality alone, the Advance process could be used to address? Do you have thoughts on Advance or this website that you'd like to share with us?

We'd love to hear from you. If you have any comments, you can submit them in the form alongside. We look forward to reading your thoughts.

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THANKS

ADVANCE

The aspiration for gender equality - not just desirable, entirely possible.

Advance works with England's leading performing arts companies, transforming their aspiration for gender equality into reality. Led by Tonic Theatre, we are removing barriers to female talent both on-stage and off.

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