

## Festival Feedback

### What attracted you to the festival – how did you hear about it and why did you come along?

- Positive past experiences – Through the acta website and direct correspondence.
- An opportunity to network and compare notes with key people making community theatre and a small selection of academics who have a practical interest in community theatre.
- Opportunity to see some recent work and hear from participants involved their views on the process and experience as a whole.
- acta contacted me as I had applied for a job with them previously. As soon as I heard about it I jumped at the chance as it was such a brilliant opportunity to meet people in this field of work that is so often fragmented and low profile due to a lack of funding.
- Found out about the festival through a friend. I was attracted to the festival because it was talking about other community theatre projects. I came along to network and find out about other people's work.
- Was invited to participate.
- An interest in CT. Considering career change/voluntary work in CT or related activities. I heard about it in Arts Council e circular.
- I had the privilege to be invited, which was great! I'm myself a community artist.
- I heard about the festival via email and was instantly attracted to the opportunity to talk, discuss and share practice with other professionals in the field. It was something I hadn't been involved with before and the range of performances which were confirmed was a definite highlight but ultimately being surrounded by my peers in practice excited me the most!
- We were invited.
- I would like to say I found out about the festival independently however the truth is we were invited as a company by Neil. Once we knew about it we could see what a great opportunity it would be for our company to see other groups' work and take part in workshops lead by other experienced practitioners.
- I was invited by Neil and Helen.
- Heard about it from acta's staff members. I came along because I wanted to help out, to learn more about community theatre, to make contacts and connections.
- Collective Encounters – We were performing; I belong to Collective Encounters drama group; being invited by acta was a great honour, I heard about it from Collective Encounters; press ganged (naval terminology for joining up), but seriously, invited by acta to perform a play; Collective Encounters made it sound interesting and asked us to come along and take part, I enjoyed it very much; I heard about it from Collective Encounters, and we performed a short play; it would be a chance for a new experience of seeing new shows, doing different sessions, I got asked to participate in a show so I had to come along; we were invited by acta to bring our Third Age participant group along to perform and to deliver two workshops on TFSC practise.

**Can you think of three words to summarise your experience of the festival?**

Refreshing, nourishing, inspiring

Positivism, human, diverse

Inspirational, Unity, Celebration

Interesting, informative and imaginative

Thought provoking, Inspirational, Exciting

Inspiring, heart-warming, intellectual

Beautiful diverse women (and men)

Inspirational, Lively, Fun

Enlarging, various, friendly

Celebratory, welcoming, genuine..

Inspiring, community and rewarding

Welcoming, creative, community- focussed

Eventful, incredible, memorable

Enlightening, fun, inspiring

Fantastic, wonderful, exciting

Hard work = performance

Fun, educational, wonderful

Great, fun, eye-popping

Fun, fun, fun

Welcome, enjoyment, engagement

Ooper, super, dooper

**Which festival moments ( a workshop, a conversation, a show) were most useful for you, and which was your favourite moment of the week? Why?**

- NHS Cabaret show, Bed, SnakeSkin, many wonderful conversations, most of the workshops had outstanding moments. There was almost a moment where an informal network of community theatre practitioners was established. Best workshop was Mandy Redvers-Rowe, because participants were leading the warm up and closing exercises and this was refreshingly inclusive.
- No one moment. International workshop, next generation workshop, acta community programme workshop provided me with new questions and new knowledge. Citizen Theatre's performance stood out for me but only because I didn't get to see. - New knowledge is self-explanatory. New questions refer to my own practice and organisational structures.
- I really enjoyed Rosalie's workshop as it was great to learn about the games and techniques you use to make people feel comfortable and open with one another. The international perspective in the discussion with companies from Holland and Slovakia was really interesting and felt like a rare opportunity to find out more about their work. The Glasgow Citizen's Show. I found out more about a theatre company from Rotterdam and the ways they work with groups and lead projects that culminate in a celebration, when performing on stage is not appropriate. This was really useful to me and these are ideas that I will take in to my own work.
- Talking and creating contacts nationally, because applied theatre is very spread out across the country it's rare to have such likeminded people in one space at one time.
- The Malcolm X performance and the 10am reflection sessions, because participants taking central role in contributing to the discourse. Sadly still so rare.
- Talking to a very engaging elderly woman about her participation in devised theatre at ACTA. The phrase "equality of narratives" and all it implies used by one speaker resonated with deeply held convictions. The performance by the Somali woman dealing with an autistic son and being inspired to set up a charity and reach out to others was really moving and inspiring. Also up-lifting. Dispelled my slight prejudice that such theatre is worthy but a bit grim. Was truly uplifting.
- Wow difficult question. I liked it all. The workshop from London Bubble, Jonathan Petherbridge had some great conversations, very clear. London Bubble had a very clear explanation of their process. A conversation with Francois Mattaraso. Francois approached me on a comment I made in a workshop, we had a very nice conversation about it which gave me a feeling that I was right in my way of thinking about how I want to approach the work I do and how to continue. The show from Can Manchester was also one of the best moments. Also the subject whether the work is therapeutic or not was brought up by Can Manchester Creative director. Which is also a question that is on my mind. Also Jonathan had specific ideas about it. The Can show was beautiful and only women, full of recognition of my own work.
- Morning After Discussions - The ability and space to listen to the process, the reasoning and the experiences of the participants was imperative – I don't think we make enough time as a sector to reflect.

- Conversations - They helped to give a context to things I experienced in workshops and at the show.
- I really appreciated the connections and conversations I had with other practitioners during the intense few days. I always like a workshop where I gain a few new exercises for my tool kit of material and I found this in Rosalie's first workshop. I enjoyed watching all the communication made between my group and the others. I thought it was immensely beneficial for the Citizens Community Collective group to witness and hear the experiences of other groups and individuals present. I was particularly delighted on the Friday afternoon when we returned that 2 members of our group delivered a devising exercise they had picked up, to the rest of the Community Collective. It was great to see the confidence they had in delivering this and it had obviously been something that had inspired them.
- useful - conversation with young enthusiastic people; moment - concert with Neil playing sax; why? - a lot of passion.
- Speaking with the lady from the Baring foundation who agreed the funding for the Making of Me project I work on, all the performances, seeing Neil well up during the closing speech. It was great to meet the person who made Making of Me possible and talk to her about the work 'on the ground' so to speak. I love to see how theatre has made a positive impact on people's lives. Seeing Neil well up was very moving and brought home the passion.
- Collective Encounters – Every part of the festival was useful to me; never gone to anything like that before. I loved performing, watching other performances, taking part in workshops – fave moment when Somali woman said she always wanted to hear her son say “Mum” – this was included in the piece and in the performance her son stood up from the audience and said “Mum” – very moving, and shows power of drama. The rehearsal, because I need it. All the groups were great to be in and part of. The ladies from the asylum seekers who were performing about autism, and my favourite was us performing, because it was the first time we'd performed out of Liverpool. The Glasgow prison workshop, because as a veteran, I was interested in prison contact. Meeting all the different people, and Moonshine Nights was wonderful because it took me back to when I was a child, playing games. The African Caribbean ladies with their stories from childhood, it was so full of fun and laughter. I would have to say the prison workshop and our second show (we made so many mistakes, but still put in an amazing performance) – it was great to know that a convicted criminal can still be part of theatre. Favourite moment was watching Moonshine Nights – was wonderful, warm, and had a great structure that I felt could be used when working with older people in general. It was great to network with other community casts and other people working in the field. A true sharing opportunity.

## How could the festival be improved?

Not sure I know.

Actually wonderful the way it is.

It's very hard to say as I thought it was brilliant! Just make it bigger and higher profile so more people can enjoy it!

Parking, more information about local transport and maps etc.

Difficult to say – seemed to have done what it set out to do and much more...

Think the widespread nature of some venues and hilly environment was a bit of a challenge for some older/disabled participants. Difficult to get round that one, but needs some thought.

It was not always clear where to go to the workshop, who to follow. I ended up in the wrong workshop. So that could be made more clear.

More structured discussion sessions maybe using the World Café model which would aim to ask questions such as 'Why Community Theatre' a big question to attempt to ask in just over an hour, using a space with several tables and give more opportunity for genuine networking and sharing of practice. More creative approaches to conversations rather than sitting down and talking. A 'light bulb' area for continuous updating and sharing. A big meet and greet for all participants of the festival to try and break down the awkward first meetings.

We needed better video projection facilities for our workshop, such as a blackout and stereo sound.

More practical workshops

I am not sure. Making it bigger!

Collective Encounters:

- Sometimes the walk between venues was a bit tough on our older participants, so more transport.
- Make the event last longer.
- I don't believe it could be improved.
- Transport to/from venues; relaxation time / sightseeing trip; break in seminars (coffee)
- Can't – everything was perfect.
- Have it on longer.
- I'm not sure.
- I can't think of anything obvious beyond extending it somehow.
- Could not think of any way it could be improved. Just brilliant.

**Do you have any thoughts about what next - how to follow on from the festival? How can the sector continue the conversations started at the festival?**

On an international front, it seems logical to seek out further exchange of different types. Compiling an online series of essays reflecting some of the conversation. International chat room hosted by acta website?

I think we should try to set up some kind of online area where we can talk to one another and share link and possibly even resources. It could be very simple like just a private facebook group to start with and we can migrate to somewhere more suitable later.

More work placements and support for up and coming facilitators. This is the position I am in and working freelance can be very isolating I don't often get chances to learn from more experienced practitioners without having to spend a lot of money on training. The fact that you gave me a concessions ticket to a day of the festival was a fantastic opportunity to me and made me feel more connected to a community of artists and facilitators.

Keep inviting people to see their work.

Ways of linking practice across the country - doing and reflecting.

I would love to exchange some work or visit a different group to see how they work. That could be something to be arranged in the festival. Or like in our workshop, the idea of working together could be spread out into different workshops to get it REALLY going.

Do it again! Some sort of annual get together which tours around the country to different venues to host. A newsletter which all can contribute to and which goes out quarterly? A digital platform for continuing conversations and keeping in touch.

A community theatre conference which looks more at theory to complement the practice of this festival.

There could be an event that is just for practitioners to share discuss and share practice.

It should be regular event...ideally each year...with some foreign guest performing at least one play.

This is a tricky one as it's down to people to keep the connections going. I guess questions raised can be explored through the work we do.

Collective Encounters:

- I'd like to go back to the festival.
- I want to perform more. I would like to help set up a drama group for asylum seekers and refugees in Liverpool.
- More of them.
- By having it annually?
- Build on what has been achieved; spread the word; seminars.
- Not sure – make more activities possible.

- I loved this festival and wonder whether we could continue the conversations by having an annual festival that perhaps tours the country, taking place in a different community arts venue each time, enabling us to develop greater understanding of each other's practice and increase access to participate in the sessions.

**Any other comments – anything else you think we should consider?**

Thank you so much! It was a wonderful experience and I feel really lucky to have attended. It has made me reflect on my own practice made me a better facilitator. I also made new friends and connections.

Praise for the lunch spread and speakers involved in the workshops e.g Helen Nicholson.

You make Bristol one of the warmest, friendliest places to visit. Ensure you sustain it. It will be needed more than you know in the future.

Just that it was wonderful.

No you did a wonderful job! Great food, lovely volunteers. Great people, shows and workshops! I enjoyed every minute.

I had an absolutely amazing time at the festival, everyone was so welcoming and friendly. The team at ACTA are wonderful and you did a great job – you all deserve a good rest.

A very friendly and welcoming organisational success.

I just want to say how well supported I felt at the festival, both by the management team and volunteers. Time for informal conversation is always important at these events.

Thank you for all.

I had a great time at the festival. I left with a real sense of being with people who want to make a difference. I also noticed the diversity of people attending and involved with the festival: people with disabilities, older people, people from different ethnic backgrounds, people from different social and economic backgrounds. Something I have noticed which acta does that I haven't experienced in other mainstream arts organizations is the lack of hierarchies. I loved the fact that at the festival we all ate together.

I thought this festival was very well organised and had an excellent content i.e. workshops, shows etc. Staff were welcoming, the Production Manager was excellent and we as a group felt incredibly well looked after and supported. Thank you.

More and more festivals.