

Sheffield Theatres Submission to Sheffield Race Equality Commission- 24 July 2021

Background to Sheffield Theatres

Sheffield Theatres is a leading producing UK theatre. With the Crucible, Lyceum and Studio theatres, our creative programme and business models deliver high quality, award winning productions for Sheffield, the Region and the Nation. Our mission is to create bold and brilliant theatre and to make it for everyone.

In the full year prior to the pandemic hitting, ST's turnover was £14,491k per year. As a not for profit organisation, our business relies on 89% of income directly from audiences; predominantly through ticket sales, food, drink and individual fundraising. Our public subsidy is from Arts Council of England (9%) and from Sheffield City Council (2%). Our business model is driven by welcoming over 400,000 visitors a year to our theatres, both **creating** theatre (in the Crucible and Studio) and **presenting** theatre in the Lyceum Theatre. We also host the World Snooker tournament each spring in the Crucible.

ST's diverse programme of original work encompasses musicals, drama, and bold new writing. We are a key originating venue for the UK's network of producers and nurture, partner and support independent companies including Utopia Theatre, ETT, Stockroom (Out of Joint), fingersmiths, Clean Break and Paines Plough. In 2019 (last full year) we employed 318 freelancers to make our productions.

Our original work feeds the sector and has international reach, through commercial transfers, tours and screen adaptations. In 2021, one new productions will transfer to London and EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT JAMIE will be released as a movie. These shows, the latest in a string of tours

and transfers, began life in Sheffield and are the result of extensive strategic investment in new writing and local talent.

During the pandemic we have been resolute in our commitment to artists and audiences. We launched FREE CHEERS FOR SHEFFIELD in summer 2020, offering moments of creative connection to everyone online. We went on to create the TOGETHER SEASON, making ambitious shows with resourceful, recycled designs and co-producing with local theatre maker, Utopia Theatre, HERE'S WHAT SHE SAID TO ME, DAMIAN'S POP UP PANTO and Chris Bush's new work THE BAND PLAYS ON all shared online.

In May, we welcomed a range of local artists onto our stage for the TOGETHER SEASON FESTIVAL and was led by Anthony Lau, our Associate Artistic Director (supported by RTYDS), alongside a volunteer panel and is designed to reach a wider, more diverse range of artists and companies and create a more open, transparent programming process. Companies included Rationale Arts, Spiltmilk Dance, Kafayat Adegoke.

In June, we moved outdoors with the TOGETHER IN THE SQUARE festival and performed to 6,000 people over the two weekends with acts that included Bonnie and the Bonnettes, Tommi Bryson, Magid Magid, Otis Mensah.

We are committed to reaching everyone, particularly those for whom cultural opportunity is limited. We engage thousands of young people (CYP), working closely with LCEP Create Sheffield in areas of least engagement. Throughout the pandemic we have supported schools and CYP, both online and through local partnerships. We distributed 8,000 Bags of Creativity direct to homes. Sheffield People's Theatre, our multi-generational participation company celebrates its 10th anniversary and has 500+ members. Its work now includes a Young Company for ages 18-25, and a group for adults with learning disabilities, making an invaluable difference to its participants' lives.

Our artist's space, The Bank, has taken our talent development to the next level, offering bespoke career progression to exciting, diverse local artists and we continue to provide creative, pastoral and financial support to the wider community. ST also leads The Making Room, a 600-strong network of Sheffield's theatre-makers and companies developing talent across the city.

1. Evidence of racial inequality and racism in Sheffield that you hold, and which may be of use to the Commission

In collating and submitting this evidence, we acknowledge the impact of this work on our colleagues who have experienced racism.

We are committed at Sheffield Theatres to ensuring that we advance our diversity and inclusion work despite the challenges that the last year has presented. This work feels even more vital in the light of events of the last 12 months and the inequalities C-19 has exposed.

We share the ambition to have our work, our staff and Board more representative of the city and have made some progress, despite the challenges of Covid-19, and our board is now 33% POC (was 21% POC) and SMT 33% POC (was 20% POC). The Board is chaired by Lord Bob Kerlake and the Vice Chair is Surriya Falconer.

Our workforce, although reduced over the course of the pandemic, has 6% of our workforce was non white. We know there are many barriers for recruitment and with support from partners (Stage Sight, Creative Access) are looking in ways to increase pathways to recruitment and uncover the roles we have available at the theatre, increase apprenticeships and exploring partners to help support this development.

We have made advances of representation onstage (45% POC in 2019/20), and mirrored offstage in our creative teams and in the writers we commission as we move forward.

2. Institutional approaches to related race equality duties and frameworks.

A need to diversify audiences, workforce and programme has long been identified by Arts Council England (ACE) and the National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) that it supports, of which Sheffield Theatres is one. Work to address this is a requirement of public funding, and NPOs are graded by ACE according to the criteria of its Creative Case for Diversity, which essentially asserts that the artistic argument for diversity is commensurate with moral, political or business arguments (ST received a “strong” rating for 2019/20). While race is one of the protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010 and adopted by ACE in their drive for diversity, anti-racism as a concept has until recently not been an explicit focus. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/diversity/creative-case-diversity>

Most NPOs began by making public or internal commitments to greater diversity and equality on stage; focusing primarily on race, gender and disability. Over time this was expanded to attend to creative roles off stage. In setting and meeting ST’s own goals on racial equality on stage, we worked with Tonic Theatre, whose Advance Programme for gender equality we had piloted in 2014 (<http://www.tonictheatre-advance.co.uk>) and whose Advance Network now provides toolkits and support to EDI work in partner organisations (<https://www.tonictheatre.co.uk/work/advance/>). In the year prior to the pandemic, ST’s statistics for employing actors from the global majority in roles onstage were beyond our targets, at 45%.

There has been a concurrent movement in the arts for improved diversity at board level. ST partnered with Artistic Directors of the Future on their Board Shadowing scheme, piloted in Yorkshire.

<https://adofthefuture.com/2018/10/01/board-shadowing-yorkshire-edition-launch/>

A survey conducted in May 2021 by Inc Arts (IA) assessed the race equality action of 83 organisations (including ST) after a year of anti-racist campaigning following the murder of George Floyd. The resulting report's introduction says "we wanted to see if arts and culture organisations were doing more than just posting a 'black square'. <https://incarts.uk/incarts-research>

The conclusions it draws are cautiously optimistic about advances made in the sector in the areas of board recruitment and work commissioned for the UK's stages, as well as observing general improvement and an encouraging focus on action over symbolic gesture: "ACE NPOs generally have made a more holistic commitment to inclusion across the board, from public commitment and programme changes to deeper internal reflections and changes."

However, it identifies little change in the make up of the wider workforce, which remains a key area of concern. ACE's most recent report on diversity in the sector tells us 13% of the NPO workforce identifies as BME*, which is below the national average. The percentage of BME Chief Executives is 11%, Artistic Directors 12%. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-report-2019-20>

ST shares the concerns of industry bodies like ACE and Inc Arts about the low levels of diversity within the salaried workforce. Our own staff remains overwhelmingly white, and placements and traineeships through initiatives such as ACE's Changemakers scheme, have not had a lasting impact on our statistics. We are in step with the rest of the sector in identifying this as a vital priority in achieving true racial equality in the theatre.

**We acknowledge that the terminology employed by ACE in this report no longer reflects the language with which people from the global majority wish to be identified.*

3 Evidence from your organisation or your analysis of the cause(s) of racism and/or racial inequality within your sector.

The following is our thoughts and analysis of some causes of racial inequality in theatre and the performing arts sector as a whole:

- A repertoire drawn from the Western canon, which has been generated over centuries, overwhelmingly by white men
- Power structures established over centuries that reassert themselves through the art they create*
- Dramatic reductions in public subsidy, forcing theatres into greater dependency on commercially bankable programming and encouraging aversion to risk
- Catastrophic long-term defunding and de-centering of the arts in education
- A rigid school curriculum that places the importance of hard to access, historic Western canon over a responsive approach to the circumstantial needs of young people
- Inherent socio-economic inequalities that lead to a lack of cultural engagement and a possible resistance within some communities to theatre and the performing arts as a career
- A lack of diversity in drama schools and training programmes
- A persistent lack of diversity on boards
- A persistent lack of diversity in leadership
- A persistent lack of diversity in staffing
- A persistent lack of diversity in the most nationally visible cultural leadership roles
- An approach to casting that relegates people from ethnically diverse backgrounds to supporting or subsidiary roles
- A persistent lack of artists from ethnically diverse backgrounds leading and creating work on the biggest stages in this country
- The persistent perception of theatre as a white, middle-class pastime

- A lack of long-term consistent, connected, coherent strategy from industry and funding bodies, including ACE, arts trade unions, DCMS and local government

*For further development of this argument, a supplementary essay by RTYDS Associate Artistic Director Anthony Lau is available on request, of which the following is an extract:

“Theatre making is based on a tradition and although we do not compare the theatre sector of 2021 to that of Restoration times, we do suggest that the systems and structures of the theatre going and making society of today is founded upon those heady days of the 17th Century. That period of theatrical history seeded a middle to upper class audience and a particular demographic of artist that has germinated, grown, blossomed and taken root over the intervening 400 or so years.

The lack of representation and diversity on the stages in our country, in the stories that are being told and in those telling them, mean that those being drawn to the theatre, to sit in the audience or to be a part of the industry remain the same.”

4. Examples of good practice in relation to reducing racism and/or racial inequality (from within the city, elsewhere in the UK, or overseas).

Examples of good practice to reduce racial inequalities has been with ACE, who has toughened its approach to making funding contingent on meaningful action in this area.

Organisations like Inc Arts (www.incarts.uk) and Sour Lemons (www.sourlemons.co.uk) have presented well-researched, co-created

recommendations for action for the sector, which draw on examples of good practice nationally and internationally. ST has engaged Inc Arts as consultants to guide our development, embarking on anti-racism training for the whole organisation and signing up to their Unlock programme – a toolkit of over 100 actions to help creative workplaces become more inclusive. <https://incarts.uk/unlock>

We partner with organisations across the sector – such as The Regional Theatre Young Directors Scheme – whose values align with ours and who take innovative approaches to improving diversity. (www.rtyds.co.uk)

Stage Sight was founded with support from ST to address the lack of diversity in offstage creative and technical roles, collating and creating examples of good practice. (www.stagesight.org). [We are currently supporting the growth of stage sight and establishing it as a company in its own right.](#)

Community engagement is vital to improving diversity, not just through direct participation in groups such as ST's Sheffield People's Theatre (<https://www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/get-involved/sheffield-peoples-theatre>), but in consultation and co-creation re artistic programming. ST's recent Together Season Festival, a programme of work in the Crucible by local artists, was curated by a representative panel of citizens.

5. What you or your organisation believe would be the best way to tackle racism and/or racial inequality in the city.

We believe a city-wide approach is essential to addressing inequalities in the city. Joined-up thinking, and a coherent, collaborative, properly funded strategy is required – formulated in consultation with, and ideally led by, people from ethnically diverse communities.

Collaborations such as the Sheffield Culture Consortium will be key in creating the opportunity to instigate safe spaces for listening, learning and co-designing processes and actions that will begin to eradicate the institutionalised racial inequalities. All organisations in the city must be encouraged to acknowledge this as an ongoing agenda.

There should be a working group to identify why there are not enough opportunities for people of colour in the city. Efforts should be made to understand what barriers people of colour are facing in employment within the sector. It is also important that there are more white people who are real allies and not performative allies, who are ready to stand up and call out incidences of racism and inequality.

ST will continue to champion diverse voices, with a growing emphasis on transparency and inclusivity in programming; our partnership with Utopia Theatre will help to showcase work from the Black community and our Open Submissions programme (Together Festival) of work by Sheffield artists will be selected by a representative panel of local volunteers.

We will develop our personal contribution as white leaders to allyship and how we can do more to support individuals who have experienced racism in the industry.

Sheffield Theatres has committed to a number of actions to improve and speed up our equalities, diversity and inclusion agenda:

1. **Appoint** an EDI Consultant to help SMT and the Board deliver our Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion plan by April 2021.
2. **Train** our Board, Senior Team and Managers in anti-racist behaviours, as well as all staff on an annual basis, and to share knowledge, skills and strategies. To be completed by November 2021.
3. **Publish** our statistics on diversity, gender, etc (annually in April).

4. **Create** an Equalities Group to drive change that will include Board Members, SMT, previous freelancers and community members from under-represented groups (by Dec 2021).
5. **Devise** a series of public events and opportunities for under-represented groups to showcase their work alongside the Garfield Weston Culture Fund (to be completed by May 2022).
6. **Invite** every freelancer working in the theatres, or visiting on tour to share their experiences of working with us, and their feedback of working and living in the city (to be piloted in summer 2021).
7. **Create** more opportunities for resident companies, internships, apprenticeships and talent development for under-represented groups (ongoing).
8. **Continue** an ongoing dialogue and engagement with staff on EDI practices to further improve change at Sheffield Theatres.

Written by and attending the Commission:

Surriya Falconer – Vice Chair of Sheffield Theatres Trust Ltd

Dan Bates – CEO, Sheffield Theatres

Rob Hastie – Artistic Director, Sheffield Theatres

Bookey Oshin – Finance Operations Director

Anthony Lau, Associate Artistic Director