



## **INTRODUCTION from Jonathan Petherbridge, Creative Director**

We chose to use 'People Make Theatre' as the theme of this year's annual report.

It might sound obvious to some - clearly theatre isn't made by Squirrels or Robots, obviously all theatre has to be made by people... Which is sad because Robotic Squirrel Theatre could sell. The Robotic Squirrel Company - or RSC. Nuts.

So we think that People Make Theatre - but People, human beings let's call them. Humans can get marginalised or disguised in the process of theatre. Auditioned, made-up, lit, not lit, amplified, drowned out, written up/out/in. When Theatre becomes a product humanity can be lost. The human performer becomes an 'actor'. But without having agency. Neutralised. Serving the script. Voiceless.

Bubble try to use theatre-making to encourage Voice. Not to neutralise but to galvanise. We encourage people to make theatre because we enjoy watching.... (No, we enjoy being in the presence of)... human beings when they're being playful, artful and brave. It makes great, fresh, and honest, theatre that you feel a Human connection to.

We think this is special. We try to innovate, gather evidence and share what works with other organisations and with people who might support our endeavours or help us do it better.

As you will hear next, we use slightly different techniques to engage with different groups - but underlying and driving all our work are the key values of care, attention and sharing stories through artful play.

To develop this I've asked Marie, Georgia, Adam and Lucy to each give a specific examples of the Bubble people who make theatre.

## MARIE VICKERS - Young Theatre Makers, Project Leader

Our Young Theatre Makers programme engages hundreds of young people each year in local schools, through Southwark Youth Offending Service and in various other youth and community settings. Each of these young people have very different stories.

**I'm going to tell you about Malachi.**



Malachi was referred to us by the youth offending service after he told his worker that he quite liked drama. He lives close by so started attending the youth theatre on a Monday evening and continued to attend despite various complications in his home life. His reasons for coming back were that 'he liked the energy; he knew the workshops would help him become a better actor and that it's a fun and friendly place to be.'

This summer, we invited him to work on *We Need to Act on Knife Crime* alongside our Young Theatre Makers including Russeni, who is one of his youth theatre tutors. Malachi brought creativity, local knowledge and personal experience to the project. He arrived early every day and often reminded others to 'behave professionally'. He was keen to be seen as one of the Young Theatre Makers despite being younger and less experienced.

Through the theatre we made that week, he expressed his fears and concerns for the community and shared his thinking around why young people use knives. He pushed himself physically, mentally and emotionally and together with Russeni, Bella, Alex and Shaun gave a beautiful performance that evoked a standing ovation from the audience. Local professionals including police officers shook Malachi's hand afterwards. He went home smiling and is looking forward to making more theatre with his peers in the Bubble youth theatre this term.

## GEORGIA BOWERS - Creative Elders Programme Facilitator



The Creative Elders Programme is made up of three strands - Tea Break Theatre, Creative Homes and the Rotherhithe Shed. There are lots of stories that I could share with you today that would neatly link back to our outcomes such as the reduced levels of anxiety or depression but instead I want to share a story which I think represents something that happens across all three strands.

### **I want to tell you about Molly, an elderly lady who is now a member of Creative Homes.**

I first met Molly, in the Laundry room of her Sheltered Housing Unit, she was alone and I said hello to her. After briefly chatting I invited her to join us and her response was that she had always been a bit of a loner and felt too shy to mix with others. Molly shared with me that she would much rather be alone, so I left her with one of our flyers and carried on my day.

We then met again when her flat was having work carried out and Molly had nowhere else to go. Again I saw her in the laundry room and invited her to join us. After a while Molly sheepishly slipped in and with some gentle coaxing she began to take part.

Fast forward to a few months later and Molly is now an integral member of the group and in fact is acting as my assistant director on a piece that we are currently working on.

At the end of last term I held a review session and what always sticks in my mind is Molly coming to me at the end to say "thank you...I think I speak for all of us, we are all so lonely and this is our opportunity to meet other people".

I wanted to share this story because this is what work with elders does, it gives people the chance to make friends and the importance of this is something that we all perhaps take for granted. Through friendship comes the feeling that you are not alone and I for one strongly believe that when you know you're not alone then life can become a little easier.

## **ADAM ANNAND - Associate Director, Creative Learning**

In Speech Bubbles theatre is made every week by children with communication needs, by experienced drama practitioners and by a member of the schools support staff – Usually a TA or learning mentor.



**And I want to just focus on one of those unsung heroes of education and certainly unsung heroes of theatre making - Tash at Grange Primary** (although I could have talked about Barbara at Michael Faraday, Sue at Sandbrook in Rochdale, Veena at Charlotte Sharman, Jo over in Tower Hamlets etc etc)

When Tash first came to Speech Bubbles training I think it would be fair to say she was a little bit nervous and reticent to take part in the practical activities with other adults. However, she took some risks, and once she had seen the programme with the children she began to throw herself wholeheartedly into the activities and has now enabled over 100 children at her school to take part in the programme.

Each week when we go into the school she is calm and prepared, she has a space ready for theatre making, and she joins in the games, the story making and the acting – I have seen her as a giant, a mermaid, a space spider and a every kind of ninja and zombie.

Tash now often leads a section of the induction day and this year is mentoring one of the drama practitioners who is new to the programme.

Tash takes the theatre making as seriously as attending social services looked after children reviews.

She values the theatre making as highly as she values having attendance meetings with parents.

She values the theatre making as highly as meeting with the education psychologist to plan an individual intervention

People like Tash make theatre.

## LUCY BRADSHAW - Project Coordinator



**I'd like to introduce you to Bradie.** This photo was taken in 2012 when she was 6. You can see her sitting on a chair with the white clips in her hair and a big smile on her face. But we actually met Bradie about a year before this was taken.

She was very quiet and struggling with her speech and communication so her school referred her to take part in Speech Bubbles with us. After a year of coming to Speech Bubbles we wrote a letter to her and lots of other children who were finishing their drama in school to say that, if they'd like to continue making theatre with Bubble, we'd like to invite them to come with an older member of their family to take part in weekly workshops at our base in Rotherhithe.

And Bradie said she thought she'd like to do that, please. So she brought along her Dad (you can see Jimmy on the right hand side, laughing) and her little brother Max (sitting in between his Dad and Bradie).

And they took part in weekly Story Bubbles workshops for families in the Bubble studio. At the end of the project they came together with all of Bubble's weekly theatre groups to share stories and celebrate the opening of the new Canada Water Plaza by the tube & bus station.

So when Story Bubbles finished we said to Bradie that, if she'd like to continue making theatre with Bubble, she could come along to one of our age specific evening groups.

And she said she thought she'd like to do that, please.

And so did her Dad.

And so did her little brother.

So now we see Bradie on a Tuesday after school as a member of our 9-11 year olds class. We see Max on a Saturday morning as a member of our 6-8 year olds class. And we see Jimmy on a Wednesday evening as a member of our adult drama group.

This family have been making theatre with Bubble every single term since this photo was taken, four years ago.

They've made theatre outdoors at Canada Water Plaza, told their own versions of Grimms' fairy tales in the Biscuit Factory near Bermondsey station and most often played here in Bubble's own rehearsal room with their peers. And I like to think that they share those experiences with each other as a family.

It's people like Bradie who make theatre.

## JONATHAN PETHERBRIDGE - Creative Director

Finally this is a picture of our last intergenerational show, *After Hiroshima*.

The story behind the picture goes back a bit. *After Hiroshima* was a response to a piece called *Grandchildren of Hiroshima*. *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* was inspired by our first intergenerational project *Grandchildren of the Blitz*.



Andrew, who is on the right, and Rosie and Iris were in that original Blitz show. Rosie was 9 then and the script was built from interviews between children like her, and older people who were the same age as the child-interviewer, during the bombing of this area. The company who performed it included children and adults and employed a visceral and physical, Vernacular style, to impart the violence of the events and the impact on lives and community.

It was seen by a delegation from Japan and as a result, last year we found ourselves running a similar process in Hiroshima. Working with Japanese artists, we made *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* with children, adults and survivors of the A bomb. Visceral, communal, intergenerational, Vernacular.

This show - *After Hiroshima*, was made as a companion piece. It was made and performed in London, by a cast of 47 community performers, building on the efforts of another 200 volunteers. So who are the people behind the numbers?

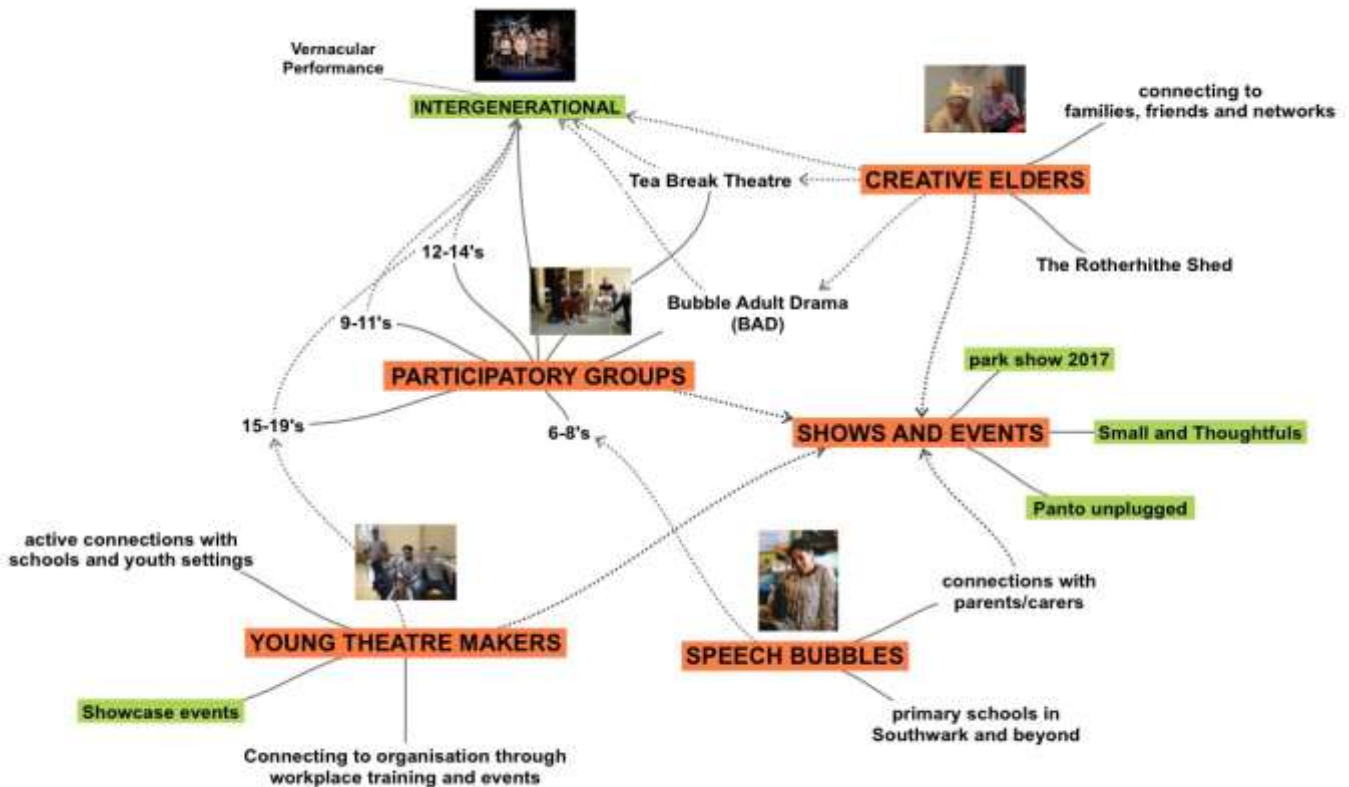
Next to Andrew and behind the sign is Sally who attends Tea Break Theatre. Behind her is David who comes to the Shed. In front is Danielle who teaches drama in a secondary school. To Rosie's right is Sae, who actually comes from Hiroshima and who I met there before she moved to work in London. Behind her is Ann, a bubble adult drama group member and co-ordinator at CND. To her



left is Cath a teacher who we first met when she was supporting Speech Bubbles in a local school. To her left is Daniel who came through the Young Theatre Makers programme.

These are a few of a highly diverse cast who told the story of the Wests response to the A Bomb. The oldest was 84 the youngest 6. The cast included London residents hailing from 13 different countries and embracing a range of needs and abilities.

And all surrounding Rosie, who joined the Bubble when she was 6 as a shy and quite withdrawn girl - and she is still a quiet girl. But she (and her Dad, Chris who happens to be sat there on the edge of the audience to the right), are local people who make our theatre.



So each of the Projects described has its own identity and outcomes, but we create pathways for people to move to new challenges if they so wish. Sometimes it's described as a house with connecting doors.

With each of these projects our aim is to innovate, then evidence, and then to share or exchange practice with other Bubble-like organisations who also work relationally.

The dedicated Bubble team including freelancers, apprentices and volunteers have helped us. To deliver 1,540 events (up 23% on last year) - these include, workshops, performances, trainings and seminars. And these achieved over 17,000 attendances. We also maintained a digital presence, and generated a number of reports, manuals, films and a booklet.

Financially while our activities have grown by 16% our income has not kept pace. During the year in question and the one we are now in, the climate for fundraising for an independent London company has worsened; there is pressure on funders to move resources out of London; the Arts Council increasingly channels small and special initiative grants to organisations they already fund as National Portfolio Organisations; currently the only revenue funding Bubble receives is from Southwark Council - 34,532 pounds of which 28,532 pounds is returned to Southwark Council as

rent for this wonderful building. As a result - despite increasing our earned income - we have been forced to reduce our core costs making on full-time and one part-time post, redundant.

Our response to this could be to retreat, to cut further and deeper and to work a smaller area in a more focused way. But I am sorry to disappoint you, for the moment we will gainsay that option.

### **In this new year our plans are to grow.**

The number of Speech Bubbles franchises will increase to 7 and reach 960 children.

The Young Theatre Makers will increase their reach working with more partners and increasing their earned income from 35k last year to almost 60k this.

Creative Homes will expand to 8 settings, and the Creative Elders programme as a whole will regularly involve 170 older and potentially vulnerable people.

And our aim is that, subject to a project grant from the Arts Council, our participants of all ages will deliver a new intergenerational piece in Vernacular style exploring the hot topic of Primary schools and the working life of teachers.

With the exception of the latter, most of this work will be delivered behind closed doors. To the general public it will remain invisible. Which is why we have another objective, to lay the ground to present an eye catching and adventurous outdoor show for families during summer 2017.

Highly visible this will raise the public profile of the organisation and retain our reputation as makers of theatre.

Like the rest of our work it will connect with the audience and involve them playfully. It will be an offer that engages adults and children, that uses the night sky, and natural surroundings as inspiration. I don't know yet what this will be as the title will be chosen by the public from 5 options, extracts of which will be shown live and online in May, to be voted on and a winner chosen.

The project will provide jobs for Young Theatre Makers front and backstage, and for professional artists and musicians on stage. And it will be crowd-funded through a mix of donations, sponsorship and pre-sold tickets driven through existing relationship with loyal supporters. It will cost £80,000 of which £15,000 has already been donated. We will need your help as advocates, but it will be fun.

Bubble's Parks Shows since the company was created in 1972 were many people's first experience of theatre - accessible, imaginative, inter-generational, they did a different job to the projects we talked about previously - the job of providing a high quality performance experience that people can attend, together with others. This is important - but it is no more important than the rest of our projects each of which does an equally important and specific job. The Parks Show is not better in any way because it's more visible. But it will do an important job that we are not doing at present.

Creating and presenting beautiful theatre performed by generous highly skilled actors and musicians, that excites a large family audience including babies in buggies and occasionally dogs. Locally.

This is a job that will bring wider benefits to all our work.

Thank you.