

# **OPEN LETTER TO THE CULTURE SECRETARY FROM DISABLED CULTURAL LEADERS, ARTISTS & INCLUSIVE COMPANIES ON SAFEGUARDING THE FUTURE OF DISABILITY ARTS IN THE UK**

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 100  
Parliament Street  
London  
SW1 2BQ

Tuesday 9 June 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

The UK's vibrant disability and inclusive arts sector is globally recognised as world leading. Across the last four decades a combination of the limitless imagination of disabled artists and essential public funding has led to a never-before-seen flowering of D/deaf, neurodiverse and disabled talent on our national stages and screens, in our literature and our galleries.

Disabled people are increasingly part of the national cultural infrastructure as artists but also as employees, administrators and trustees, in every artform and in every capacity. It was recently established that disabled people also make up 12% of national arts audiences in England.

All this inclusive progress is threatened by Covid-19.

The pandemic impacts on livelihoods, health, social care and creativity are all frighteningly magnified for disabled people. Worse, most disabled people operating in the creative industries are self-employed and deeply concerned about their future as a consequence of SEISS ending in August. Many disabled artists are facing long term shielding, a total loss of income, compromised independent living and the risk of invisibility in wider society.

Disabled cultural leaders call on the government and the sector to ensure the progress we have collectively made does not falter in this moment of crisis. Disabled artists, employees and audiences must be prioritised and celebrated in both cultural policy and delivery.

Additionally, the industry that closed in March, simply didn't work for many of us. The renewal and recovery of the wider cultural industries must be guided by a fully inclusive approach informed by disabled creative professionals to strengthen the accessibility of the sector and implement the learning from this crisis about home working and online access.

Our visionary Disability Arts Movement used a phrase in the 1980s that greatly advanced the cause of the Social Model of Disability being adopted across the world. That phrase is as relevant now in the midst of this pandemic as it was then: **nothing about us without us** .

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In this sentiment we are in full solidarity with our Black and Asian theatre colleagues who wrote to you on 28 May and with the seismic actions being taken across the world through the Black Lives Matter movement .

Disability arts is a uniquely British success story and as disabled people, we wish to play our part in the national recovery. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns directly, as with your support Secretary of State, we shall not be removed.

Signed,

Jenny Sealey MBE CEO/Artistic Director, Graeae Theatre  
Andrew Miller, Disability Champion for Arts & Culture  
Tony Heaton OBE, Chair, Shape Arts

David Hevey, CEO, Shape Arts

Ruth Fabby MBE, DL, Director of Disability Arts Cymru

Robert Softley Gale, Artistic Director, Birds of Paradise Theatre Company

Jodi-Alissa Bickerton, Creative Learning Director, Graeae Theatre

Jo Verrent, Senior Producer, Unlimited

Vici Wreford-Sinnott, Artistic Director, Little Cog / Disconsortia

Barry Farrimond MBE, CEO, Open Up Music and National Open

Youth Orchestra  
Carien Meijer, Chief Executive, Drake Music

Gareth Cutter, independent artist & Artist in Residence (Drake Music)

Melanie Sharpe, CEO, Stagertext

Julie McGowan, Trustee at The University of the Atypical,

independent artist.

Stephen Bailey, Resident Assistant Director, Chichester Festival Theatre

Toki Allison, BFI FAN Access Officer, Inclusive Cinema - Film Hub Wales

Aisling Gallagher, freelance director, theatre practitioner, Councillor London Borough of Lewisham

Kelsie Acton, dancer/choreographer, Inclusive Practice Manager, Battersea Arts Centre  
Becki Morris, Director of Disability Collaborative Network C.I.C.

Robert Sanderson, venue manager retired, arts management consultant  
occasional Jonny Cotsen, Freelance Theatre Maker / Access Consultant & Facilitator

Chris Tally Evans, freelance artist

Trish Wheatley, CEO, Disability Arts Online

Stephanie Fuller, Director/CEO, Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft

Linda Rocco, Freelance Curator, Producer and Consultant

Andrew Roach, Talent Agent/MD, Andrew Roach Talent Ltd

Daryl Beeton, Daryl Beeton Productions

Jonathan Harper, Chief Executive, Paraorchestra

Michèle Taylor, Director for Change, Ramps on the Moon

Lloyd Coleman, Associate Music Director, Paraorchestra

Sophie Woolley, Freelance Writer & Performer

Simon Morris, General Manager, Blue Apple Theatre

Ellie Page, Writer, Designer & Consultant, Managing Partner Still Ill

OK + Nice Time Arts  
John R. Wilkinson, Freelance Theatre Director, Artistic Associate, York Theatre Royal

Caglar Kimyoncu, Artistic Director, filmpro

Dr Jessi Parrott, Performer, Poet and Academic

Steve Moffitt, CEO, A New Direction

Joanne Roughton-Arnold, Opera Singer & Company Director, formidAbility

Julian Gray, Freelance Illustrator

Mik Scarlet, Broadcaster, Musician, Actor & Inclusive Practice Consultant.

Mat Fraser, actor and writer, co-director of ONEOFUS

Paul Wilshaw, actor and producer, Assistant producer at Mind the Gap

Tim Wheeler, freelance theatre-maker, arts consultant and lecturer

Kyle McCall Wilson, Social Media Marketing Officer at EGO

Performance Company Charlotte Darbyshire, Artistic Director,  
Candoco Dance Company  
Jo Royce, Executive Director, Candoco Dance Company  
Becky Morris Knight, Freelance Comms & working with Drake Music  
Donna Holford-Lovell, Director, NEEON Digital Arts (NEON)  
David Proud, Freelance Actor, Writer, Director  
Samantha Tatlow, Talent Coordinator, thinkBIGGER! Ltd,  
Justin Edgar, Film Director, Writer and Producer, 104 films  
Sam Oldknow Film Studies Masters Student  
Kim Tserkezie, Actor, Presenter, Producer, MD Scattered Pictures  
Jamie Beddard, Co-Director Diverse City & Agent for Change New  
Wolsey  
Philippa Cole, Actor  
Kyla Harris, Actor, Writer and founder of The Other Screen  
Ella Glendining, Filmmaker and Writer  
Sho Shibata, Executive Producer, Stopgap Dance Company  
Lucy Bennett, Artistic Director, Stopgap Dance Company  
Jennifer Gilbert, Director Jennifer Lauren Gallery and freelance  
producer/curator  
Amy Cunningham, Creative Director, Dark Horse Theatre  
Jess Thom, Co-artistic Director, Touretteshero  
Matthew Pountney, Co-artistic Director, Touretteshero  
Bobby Baker, artist, Artistic Director, Daily Life Ltd.  
Joe Stevenson, Freelance Writer and Musician  
Hannah Quigley, freelance director/practitioner/arts manager  
Eleanore Hall, artist, Project Manager, Club Soda Croydon  
Flossie Waite, Communications & Engagement Producer, Oily Cart  
Theatre Company Alison Garratt, Touring Producer, Oily Cart Theatre  
Company  
Martin Wilson, Director, TIN Arts  
Georgie Morrell, Comedian, Actor and Writer  
Tom Wentworth, playwright, screenwriter  
Midnight Memphis, BFI FAN Access Coordinator, Beacon Films  
Exhibition Officer, Relaxed Screenings programmer  
Nick Llewellyn, Artistic Director, Access All Areas  
Rachel Rogers, Producer, DaDaFest, Liverpool  
Hana Pascal Keegan, Freelance Director / Writer / Dramaturg  
Nabil Shaban, founder of Graeae Theatre, actor, writer, painter,  
novelist, poet, film-maker (Sirius Pictures), disability rights activist  
Lorna O'Brien, Creative Manager, MarketPlace, Creative People And

## Places

Sarah Horner, Chief Executive, Hijinx Theatre

Laura Jones, Head of Talent Development, Stopgap Dance Company

Ellie Griffiths, Artistic Director, Oily Cart Theatre

Elise Davison, Artistic Director, Taking Flight Theatre Company

Stephanie Back, Actor, workshop facilitator and lead artist of Deaf &

Fabulous Productions  
Laura Rees, Actor and current student of MA in Applied Theatre at Goldsmiths University  
Ashokkumar Mistry, Artist, Curator, Writer

Deborah Dickinson, Senior Producer, Mind the Gap

Heather Andrews, Sound Artist, Sound Designer and Recordist

Casey Bottono, BA (Hons), MA Writer and Workshop Leader, The Writers' Block

James Rose, Conductor

Rona Topaz, Singer/Actress/Choir Leader

Phoebe Kemp, Freelance Theatre Maker, Chair, Equity D/deaf and Disabled Member's Committee

Liz Porter Freelance Arts & Heritage Access Consultant/performance storyteller

Br. Andy TSSF - Singer/ Disabled Artist / Producer. Chair Disability Advisory Group. NHS.

Beth Hinton-Lever, Actor.

Lady Kitt, Artist and Drag King, co-founder of Nasty Women North East

Nicola Cashin, General manager, EGO Performance Company

Tim Nunn, Artist, Curator and Producer

Simon Yuill, Artist

Amy Trigg, Actor and Writer

Jude Škulec, Stage Technician and Dresser

Charlie Fitz, artist and writer

Will Sadler, Development Director, Beacon Films

Mike Layward Artistic Director DASH

Katie J Redstar actor,writer,director

Pauline Heath Actor and writer

Kathryn Barnett, director of disability-led arts organisation  
Regeneration NE CIC

Elaine Collins, Artist, Actor, Performer, Theatre Maker, MA student  
LIPA, Dadafest theatre makers

Dan Edge, Actor, Model, Pro Wrestler, Equity D/deaf & Disabled Members Committee Vice Chair

Tanya Raabe-Webber, Disabled Artist, Painter of People, Director of PortraitsUntold and ArtStudio01-Artists Collective  
Michelle Rolfe, Producer, BOP Theatre Morna McGeoch, Development Officer, BOP Theatre Caroline Cardus, Visual Artist, Creative Producer  
Samuel Brewer, Actor/Theatre Maker BA(hons) Acting Student Central School of Speech & Drama  
Sarah Archdeacon - Artistic Director, Corali  
Georgina Egan, Artistic Director, EGO Performance Company  
Corinne Robinson, Artistic Director, EGO Performance Company  
Kacey De Groot, Development Manager, EGO Performance Company  
Richard Nutter, Executive Director, DaDaFest  
Aidan Moesby. Artist/Curator  
Dr Vole, disabled singer/songwriter/poet  
Ben Pettitt-Wade, Artistic Director, Hijinx  
Alan Whitfield, National Visual Arts Officer, Disability Arts Cymru  
Sydney Thornbury, CEO/Artistic Director, The Art House, Wakefield  
Jen Garrick, Marketing & Communications Director, The Art House, Wakefield  
Ellie Tait, Critical Friend and Curator  
Samantha Renke broadcaster and disability rights campaigner  
Dame Evelyn Glennie - Musician, President of Help Musicians  
Beth House, Development Director/Joint CEO, Taking Flight Theatre Company  
Charles Hazlewood, Conductor, Founder and Artistic Director of Paraorchestra  
Stella Patrick, Marketing Consultant, Taking Flight Theatre Company and Freelance  
Louise Ralph, General Manager, Taking Flight Theatre Company  
Olga Macrinici, theatre maker  
Emily Garside, Chair Taking Flight Theatre Company.  
Garrin Clarke, Stage Manager, Freelance  
Katy Stephens, Actor/Manager, EGO Performance Company  
Clare-Louise English, Co-Artistic Director, Hot Coals Theatre  
Jo Sargeant, Co-Artistic Director, Hot Coals Theatre.  
Jamie Hale, freelance writer and theatre practitioner, ensemble artist Graeae Theatre Company  
Zara Rush, Producer for Corali Dance Company & People Make It Work  
Andrea Swainson - Engagement and Outreach Manager of Corali

Dance Company

Jade French, Artist-Facilitator and Academic, University of Leeds

Amit Sharma, Deputy Artistic Director, Birmingham Rep