

Culturapedia®

This is a collection of past blogs and articles written by the team on our old website. You will find our current thoughts, news and ideas on Facebook but we thought it worth keeping a few of our old gems here.

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Arts in Rural European Areas- make our place a go-to place.

Posted on July 3, 2021

Sue

We want to make Lancashire a go-to county, not a go-through one.

We always think the place we are is the centre of everything. Nobody wants to feel isolated or left out. Lancashire has an immensely beautiful and diverse landscape from the dunes to the wild Pennine hills. Our communities are equally diverse. But it is also close to the national parks of the Dales and Lake District. I remember a Dutch tutor on my master's course, telling me about his family holiday. We drove to Liverpool from Harwich, he said, because we wanted to see a match at Anfield. Then "we went past Blackpool and on to our holiday cottage in the Lakes". Went past. Excellent M6! We want to make Lancashire a go-to county, not a go through one. A place people hear of and want to talk about and visit for the right reasons, not the wrong ones.

We are active members of the newly formed Arts in Rural European Areas, a creative network of about 250 small venues, touring networks, producers and artists who work in a rural context right across Europe from Ireland to Croatia, Portugal to northern Norway. This is part of our passionate vision to share good practice and collaborate with others to put everyone's rural place on the map.

We are currently exploring an application to Perform Europe to find new ways of touring artists. The industry has been seriously harmed by Covid rules, and in the UK, Brexit is a huge headache harming incoming and outgoing artists. Why tour? How can we tour sustainably, affordably and reach remote communities? AREA is so new, that they are still building a website. But the groups meet regularly to share ideas, identify common research and explore new possibilities. This post will be updated when we can add a link.

When you talk to a colleague in southern Italy about their festival or hear of rural touring in Sweden, or of a theatre in rural north Norway, it is instinctive to want to visit. So, our team wants to do the same for Lancashire- make what we do exciting, inspiring and worth visiting. A place to go to.

Research that is giving us legs

Posted on June 30, 2021

Rob

It has not been without stress but Culturapedia has weathered the COVID-19 Pandemic more or less intact. We may have been doing things differently over the past 16 months but we've kept busy. Two of the things that have kept me busy have been responding to how others have fared.

The first is a project under the working title of 'The Shit! Corona Chronicles' in partnership with Erasmus University in Rotterdam. We thought it important to chronicle the experiences of professionals working in the field of Arts And Culture. In the years to come, there will be plenty written, in hindsight, on how the pandemic changed the way that we do things or accelerated changes that were already underway. The Chronicles offer an immediate record of responses, issues, challenges and ideas as they were happening. This is not a peer-reviewed academic journal, but rather a repository of experiences. Our pool of authors came from Arts and Culture Studies students and alumni from Erasmus University. Its international courses mean that we received responses from across the world offering an insight into very different government responses and personal challenges. Over the past twelve months, we have collected over 50 stories which are due to be published in an e-book in July. My role has been co-editor of the book and English editor of the international contributions. It has provided a fascinating insight into how many of the challenges we have experienced are the same as those in other countries. It has also highlighted the precociousness of the arts and cultural infrastructure, especially outside of Europe. I have thoroughly enjoyed this project and look forward to the finished version being available to all to read.

The chronicles bring together experiences from across the cultural and creative industries. For some, sharing ideas with a group of peers in similar organisations has been a positive outcome of COVID 19. Last year, one such group that came together is the Artist Led NPO group. NPOs are Arts Council's core National Portfolio Organisations. Spot On Lancashire is an NPO. It refers to the companies that get core, rather than project-based funding. The Artist Led NPOs share a number of, if not all of the following characteristics. They may be led by founding creative entrepreneurs; they are performance based; they are peripatetic and don't have their own venues; they produce new work and are often involved in co-creation or participation. In addition, they are all micro-businesses and vertically integrated with a small core team which is supplemented by freelancers as and when needed. Back in March '21, the group invited us to support them with some research leading to ways that the group can advocate for themselves as a distinct part of the arts ecosystem. Like us, being small and nimble, without heavy building overheads, they have survived by being creative and changing what they do. Once restrictions are over they have a chance to be stronger from the experience. We have been exploring ways for this sub-sector to be recognised for the value and innovation that they bring to the national arts ecology. This project also finishes its current stage in July.

It is hard to really understand the impact that a crisis is having when you're still in the thick of it. As I write, an end to legal restrictions is due in just over a fortnight but none of us really know when and where we're going to land. Hearing from others and taking an objective look at experience across the sector has been invaluable in informing us as a company and, I hope, helping us support those around us.

A brief overview of how we're working creatively with people to give ideas legs

Posted on June 30, 2021

Lyndsey

Lancashire is our home...

We've been putting our mission into action in the county we live in; by working with volunteers to curate events and increase the cultural offer of Lancashire's small towns and villages, bringing live literature to pubs, enhancing the cultural events offer of Lancashire libraries, championing the arts through local networks and hubs.

Our scope is wider than our county boundary...

We work across the North to feed into a wider sector; touring arts programming with regional partners, developing consortium projects – our most recent to offer rural touring mentoring to artists culminating in a northern tour to 7 rural touring schemes.

In fact, we're national....

Working digitally allows us to engage with a whole new audience and new partners; delivering our Spot On Stories project for Lancashire Libraries and The Space, undertaking research, evaluation and advocacy for other arts organisations and managing the marketing for a national touring dance initiative.

And international...

We're currently working for Erasmus University Rotterdam co-editing a new online book chronicling the experiences of professionals working in Arts And Culture from around the World. We are active members of the newly formed Arts in Rural European Areas, a creative network of venues, producers and artists who work in a rural contexts across Europe. This is part of our vision to share good practice and collaborate with others to put rural places on the map.

Up-cycling old books into festival bunting

Posted on September 23, 2019

Rob



What do you do when you're trying to make [Burnley Literary Festival](#) a bit more festive and you've acquired a load of old unwanted books? Up to now the festival has been, dare I say, a bit corporate. The normal merchandising stuff – roller banners, printed bunting, bookmarks, black hoodies and polo shirts. Nowt wrong with that but at Culturapedia we like to think of ourselves as being a bit more creative. We were lucky to acquire a few boxes of old plays and scores that no one wanted anymore. To save them from the pulping machine I decided to make a few hundred meters of paper bunting to liven up Burnley Town Centre from

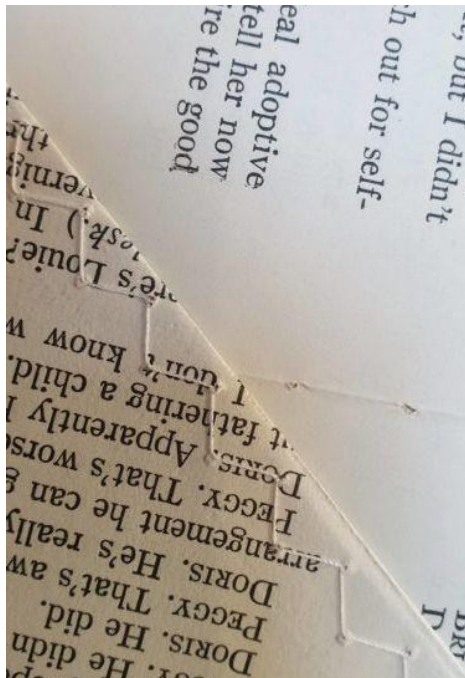
October 3rd to 6th.



The first task was to dismantle the books. Brute force, a blade on the stitching and come careful prising leaves you with a large pile of printed paper. These old books are yellowed with age and smell just like

second-hand bookshops, I suppose. Instead of making the traditional triangles spread apart on a ribbon, I folded each double-page across the diagonal creating two overlapping scalene triangles.

Using the fold at the top, the double triangles are wider than they are deep so I decided not to leave a gap between them as you get with traditional bunting. I bought a job lot of narrow ribbon going cheap.



The colours are horrible but without a gap and by folding each piece of paper over it before stitching, it can hardly be seen. All that remained was to sew them up. I used a large zigzag stitch in strong white cotton, not dissimilar to the thread that held the books together when they were made. A large stitch is less likely to tear the paper and adds a functional aesthetic. I have sewn hundreds of meters of the stuff and the paper really blunts the needles but I'm really pleased with the effect. It adds a vintage vibe and has all been about recycling too.

Some of the bunting has been put up already in the market and in the window of an empty shop in Charter Walk. Come the festival weekend there will be a lot more. We're hoping that it will be fine and that we can use it outside as well.

Look out for it at our various [festival venues](#) and think of me at the sewing machine and the smell of old books.

We're living in a world that is obsessed by big data but that doesn't relate to the rural areas of Lancashire. We can't manage the arts using big data

Posted on June 17, 2019

Rob

Last weekend I was invited onto to a panel at the [National Festival of Making](#) as part of their talks programme co-ordinated by [Creative Lancashire](#). I was also asked to write an article for thee talks brochure which I've reproduced below.



Rob on stage with Kathy McArdle, Christine Cort, Wayne Hemingway, Paula Akpan & Dawinder Bansal

Last weekend I was invited onto to a panel at the [National Festival of Making](#) as part of their talks programme co-ordinated by [Creative Lancashire](#). I was also asked to write an article for the talks brochure which I've reproduced below.

Is a festival the answer to fixing a broken and divided nation in a post Brexit, Trumpian age?

If it is then how on earth do we honestly evaluate that? We live in an age of bean counters where nothing can happen without postcodes being collected and people being asked about the colour of their socks. We can work out who attended but how do we truthfully work out the long term social or economic impact of festivals? Without empirical evidence, it's difficult to convince public sector investors, whose core business is increasingly financial management and data gathering, to stump up the cash. Unfortunately, that empirical evidence is often flawed and sometimes downright dishonest.

Not all cultural policy is based on empirical research. It can be based on assumptions, tradition or ideology. Half-truths and misleading headlines often influence policy in this post Brexit, Trumpian age. Flawed and misinterpreted research has led to a myriad of poor decisions. Richard Florida has recently conceded that his arguments on the importance of the Creative Class, backed up by empirical research, were flawed. These influenced cultural policy in cities across the world in the nineties and noughties.

Evaluative research is often framed to endorse a current policy or activity without exploring alternatives. Not all researchers are objective. Many will have an agenda, from consultants seeking to please their paymaster to festival organisers seeking to justify their funding.

Some will argue that validity only comes with independent, academic, empirical research but inconsistency, bias and abuse of the sacred peer review system have all been evidenced. Sometimes the methodology is just flawed and uninformed. A city considering an application to be a European City of Culture may well consider the peer reviewed findings of Steiner, Frey, and Holz (2015) on life satisfaction in previous host cities. This research is based on regional data completely ignoring the fact that some EU NUTS Regions are vast. Their conclusion that traffic disruption may cause dissatisfaction in a region where some of the population live 400 miles away from a host city is not helping anyone develop a cultural festival policy.

I don't know if a programme of festivals can heal a divided post-Brexit nation. I do know, from experience, that a well run festival is likely to have a positive impact on people and places. What data and statistics reveal can be informative but what they don't record – laughter, conversations, shared experiences, a buzz on the high street, wonder, inspiration, energy and positivity are vital. These are the things that have a long term impact on bringing people together, health and wellbeing, place and economic vitality.

I am not arguing that we shouldn't evaluate but we need to recognise that data only tells half the story. At the same time, we need to learn to put our trust back in the creative experts. When planning and looking at the potential worth of a festival, let's get back to valuing professional observations, common sense and informed instinct and take some of the statistical analysis with a large pinch of salt.

Why do we love engagement but feel a bit “yucky” about marketing?

Posted on March 28, 2019

Stephie

When I first joined Culturapedia, my job title was “Programmer and Community Engagement Coordinator for the Plugged In project” catchy, I know – my lanyards were HUGE. It was a title I was proud to have. It mixed the perfect blend of art and community, and importantly, to me at the time, was not labelled as ‘marketing.’

I had previously dipped my toes into the world of arts marketing and had firmly decided it was not for me. The stress of constantly having to sell sell sell, the confusing world of press releases and the panic of ‘what do I do with all these leaflets?’ would keep me up all night.

Turns out the joke was on me.

Because marketing is trying to get people to see art and community engagement is also trying to get people to see (or take part) in art. Now, 5 years on, while I'm still programming and engaging people, those more traditional elements of marketing are a big part of what I do.

Obviously, that's a very simplistic way of looking at it, but at the heart of those two roles, that's what you'll find: someone working their socks off to get the public involved.

So why do we feel so excited and passionate about engagement, but most of us feel a little bit cringey about marketing?

I work with lots of artists and nearly all of them love encouraging people to get involved with their art form, through outreach programmes and workshops, but talk to them about their leaflets or improvements to their show copy and their eyes glaze over, blurting out 'oh I'm not a marketing person.'

I get it. As I said before, the world of more traditional marketing can seem scary – like there are lots of hidden rules and terrifying targets to be hit. We don't like to think of ourselves, or our art as a product to be consumed. But the truth is, for many many potential audiences, the first time they engage with your art IS through something like your leaflet.

If you think of it like that, suddenly marketing isn't something to be afraid of or to baulk at, but something to be embraced. It's just another strand of engagement. And what would you put on your leaflet if you stopped thinking of it as a sales tool and started to think of it as a way to engage people?

I imagine we'd start to see a lot less jargon, or copy and pasted buzz words.

Most of the time we feel a little 'yuck' about marketing because we see it as something separate to our art. A task to be done by someone who can spell better than we can, or someone who has a

degree, or a history of hitting sales targets. And while those people can be fantastic at marketing our art nobody knows your music, or show, or poetry as well as you do.

So next time you start to freak out about marketing and think ‘that’s not for me’ bring it back to basics.

Why are you passionate about what you do?

Why do you think other people should get involved or see the show?

What was it that convinced you to get involved?

What language do you use when you’re running engagement workshops or outreach?

Because there are a lot of technical things to think about with your leaflets, and design and how to write a press release, but that’s the bit people like me are here to help you with, but you’re the only real expert in your own work.*

*please don’t use the word ‘work’ on your leaflets – most people who aren’t involved in “the arts” don’t want to go and see something called ‘work’ on a Friday night.

Student gigs in village halls?

Posted on March 4, 2019

Rob

“Statistics are like a bikini. What they reveal is suggestive, but what they conceal is vital.”
Aaron Levenstein.

The above quote by Levenstein is certainly true. It is becoming increasingly apparent to us that geographical data can have the same effect. Researchers and data crunchers need to be careful. Flawed research is used by policy and decision makers all the time. I have a couple of examples to enlighten you.

Back in 2015, Steiner, Frey, and Hotz wrote an academic paper on European Capitals of Culture and Life Satisfaction. In this paper they did not look at data from cities, they looked at data from Regions (NUTS/Statistical regions, level 2). In the case of big cities this might amount to the same thing. London, Europe's biggest city, is the equivalent of two regions. Let us consider the Republic of Ireland. A small country. Dublin was European Capital of Culture in 1991 and Cork, in 2005. The Republic of Ireland is split into two regions. Both Dublin and Cork are in IE02 – as are Dundalk and Tralee. According to Google maps, Tralee is 299km from Dublin. It takes 3 hours and 37 minutes to drive and the fastest public transport route takes 4 hours. Dundalk is 336km from Cork. It takes 3 hours and 26 minutes to drive and the fastest public transport route takes 4 hours and 26 minutes. The data that Steiner, Frey and Hotz used to assess cities of culture and life satisfaction included data from Dundalk and Tralee. Culture Europe do not claim that the European capitals of culture programme benefits or even has any impact on people living 300 km away. I would argue that the life satisfaction of people in Dundalk, on the Northern Irish border, was not particularly influenced by the fact that the people of Cork, on the south coast, were being excessively cultural in 2005.



In an example closer to home. This is a map which highlights the age profile of wards in Lancaster district. This pale coloured area is big. On the whole it is quite sparsely



populated. There are a lot of sheep but for most of it, not many people. It is pale because it designates that the median age profile of the population of this area is 18-32. The median age profile of all the surrounding wards is 39-44. What is going on? The little area ringed in red is the campus of the University of Lancaster. The little blocks are one of our rural venues, Abbeystead, a rural idyll that can't take shows in the spring because of lambing. If you just looked at this map you might programme to attract a young audience. In reality the young audience live in a small enclosed community in one corner of the ward would never travel to Abbeystead and have probably never heard of it. Abbeystead is where his Grace, the Duke of Westminster hangs out when inspecting his estates in

Lancashire. (Though admittedly as the current Duke is only 28 he fits the median age profile of the ward.)

The more metropolitan the area is, the more likely it is that neighbours will share similar characteristics. In London or Manchester, or even some of the large and medium sized towns in Lancashire, there is a high chance that people who share the same postcode fall into the same income bracket, have the same interests, social class, levels of educational attainment and values. This is what the big-data analysis, undertaken through postcode searches by tools such as Audience Finder, relies on. In Abbeystead people from all backgrounds, live cheek by jowl with the same postcode from the Duke of Westminster to the unskilled farm labourer (and they are all involved in lambing). On a national scale, these rural anomalies are statistically negligible but to an organisation promoting directly in these areas they are vital and render the big data analysis largely irrelevant.

Data and statistics can be useful but a degree of scepticism is vital before anyone acts. Otherwise, we'd be programming student bands in Abbeystead Village Hall.

Method and process v's instinct and sheer luck – How to programme for rural touring

Posted on March 24, 2016

Lyndsey

This week sees the culmination of over two months worth of work; hours of research, one to one phone calls, emails, youtube clips, SoundCloud excerpts and good old fashioned paper post sifting. How did I celebrate the completion of this HUGE piece of work?.... I sent an email.

Don't get me wrong, it was a lovely email, hopefully conveying the excitement of the task at hand. It demanded a thorough read, it even stated a deadline for responses and it contained 4 lovely attachments, all brimming with information.

Now I know the emails are all nestled patiently waiting to be read in in-boxes across Lancashire, I can cordially announce the month-long period of Spot On Autumn 2016 show selection is now open! (It doesn't really feel like a suitable end to a two-month project but I've become used to it. It comes around every six months and being really honest, I've already started work on the next one.)

So how does one go about curating a menu of tasty treats for village halls and libraries in Lancashire?

First step, get to know your venues, your promoters and their audiences. You can't possibly begin to choose artists for venues without first having an understanding of the type of things people visiting those venues like; the things they've previously enjoyed, the things they've previously hated. It's really important to meet the promoters hosting the events, see their venues and get a feel for the kind of work that excites them. It's also really important to have conversations with audiences, see the work in situ and read the feedback after each performance.

Secondly, see lots of work – well, as much as your budget and your capacity allow. I make it to Edinburgh Fringe for a good few days every year, I attend scratch performances when I'm invited by companies with new work to sell. I'm heavily involved with PANDA and their pitching project. I go to The Lowry, Axis Arts Centre and all manner of other performance spaces in search of new work and new contacts. I'm a member of the Big Imaginations Consortium which brings programmers together from across the North West to discuss children's theatre and collaborate on booking tours.

When seeing new work is out of the question I have lots of other avenues to find out more about a show I might have an interest in or a company I've never heard of before. My colleagues involved in rural touring are invaluable. We talk, we share leads for quality work, and we work together to commission and to block book shows.

What exactly am I looking for?

Things that catch my eye when I'm programming are very varied, it's definitely not an exact science.

First off, is the subject matter something of interest to our audiences? It might be a straightforward reproduction of a popular play, it could be a piece of new writing, a band playing skiffle music, or a dance company who finish with a ceilidh for all. Whatever it is, it has to have a unique selling point, it needs to address why our audiences would want to buy a ticket.

Does it have a good marketing image? If your poster doesn't sell your show then nothing will. Continuity of an image is really important, so hopefully, the image our promoters see in the menu will also be the image in the brochure and the same image on the posters.

How long is the show? I do programme shows that don't have an interval, but it does tend to make it harder to sell to a rural venue. That's because our promoters feel it's important to sell a whole evening of entertainment to their audiences. If promoters are getting people out of their homes and into the village hall for a night they want them to feel like they've had their money's worth.

How technical is the show? If you don't tour with your own lighting and sound equipment it's unlikely we'll be able to host you. If you have two versions of the show, one for fully equipped theatre spaces and the other for spaces with no tech, then don't send us the technical rider for the theatre – it makes me worry that you're not prepared for touring to rural venues.

How many performers are there? Last season we hosted 8 Tibetan Monks in three venues across Lancashire, but generally, we take companies of between one to five performers. If you are a 20 strong Male Voice Choir we probably aren't going to be able to accommodate you on the tour.

When is the best time to send our information? Sometimes you just have to be in the right place at the right time. I accept applications from companies and artists all year round, but when I'm reaching the point of programming I'm more focused on where I have gaps in my menu. Occasionally the lucky company who just happened to drop an email to me that week are the ones who make the menu rather than the company who has doggedly emailed me every month for a year.

And finally, sometimes I ignore all of the previous information and go with my gut! My feeling is that if it interests me and catches my attention, it will most likely attract my promoters too. If I was to spend hours deliberating over the intricacies of which venue might like which company, I'd never get anything done! I also have to trust my instincts to encourage the promoters to try something a bit different. I recently read an article in the Guardian about the challenging work rural venues are taking on and Gavin Stride gave a wonderful quote which I'm taking with me whenever I programme, "When I give the audience what they want, I disappoint them", this is my new mantra.

Plugged In Phase 1 Comes to a Sparkly End...

Posted on March 7, 2016



Last month the first phase of our strategic touring project, Plugged In, came to an end. While we wait to hear about funding for the next phase we've been looking back at everything the project achieved over the year and a half (ish) that we were working. We've put together a sparkly document celebrating all our successes, [which you can see on the Plugged In website](#), but here are some of our highlights

Some key facts and figures:

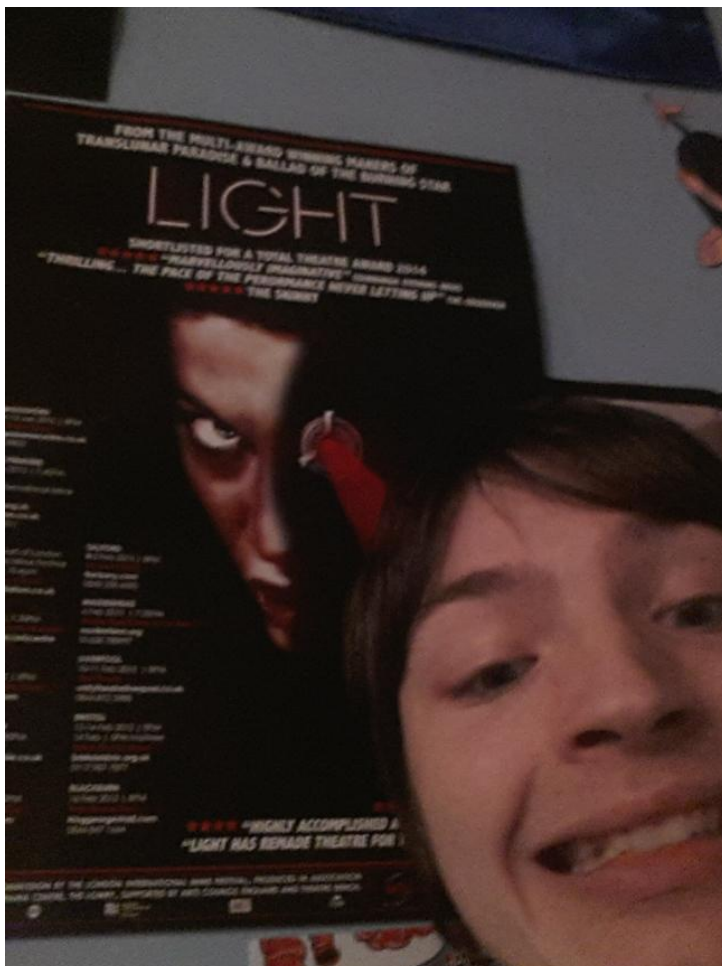
- worked with 82 community programmers and 187 youth programmers
- attracted 3563 audience members

- programmed 55 events covering music, dance, puppetry, spoken word and theatre
- spent 6 days driving around Pennine Lancashire with a group of international dancers
- spent 76 hours running free workshops in libraries, markets and cafes
- employed over 100 artists
- made our venues more accessible to new audiences – by having friendly staff and welcoming volunteers and encouraging people in, and talking to people
- built a more diverse audience for all of our venues – by putting stuff on they want to see, and working with the groups without making assumptions
- worked with other arts organisations in the North West to strengthen the links between projects and the awareness of the work they are doing

Programming Great Art

We, along with our Community Promoters have programmed some great work over the past 3 and a bit seasons. Puppetry from Horse + Bamboo, physical theatre from Theatre AdInfinitum, magic from Morgan & West and drama from Peter Macqueen, there's been something for everyone in our programme, proving that theatre isn't an elite club.

[“96% of our audiences rated the show they had seen as either excellent or very good in our audience feedback form”](#)



Young Plugged In Promoter Josh, with his prized possession, a tour poster from LIGHT which he helped to promote at King Georges Hall in February 2015

Back of the Bus – June 2015

It's not even a year since we brought 'Back of the Bus' to Pennine Lancashire but in some ways, it feels like a life time ago! When we got together as team in the office, we all agreed this was one of our highlights, not only because it was a great show, but because it was a great challenge, one that Culturapedia had never taken on before!



'Been a little low recently, lifted my mood'

'We didn't know what to expect and were not disappointed! Loved it! I will never get on or off a bus without thinking of this performance!'

'Performances like this are a little holiday in everyday life'

'I think you have given us something to treasure and inspire us'

Just a handful of comments made on our feedback form from audiences,

Back of the Bus, June 2015

Creating New Audiences and Bringing Back Old Ones...

We never ruled out a new idea for bringing back audiences to our venues and attracting new ones, and that's led to us doing some pretty interesting marketing stunts and hosting some great events in unusual places! Whether that was Fireman Dave the juggler in Darwen town centre, free craft workshops in libraries or jazz markets in bands, one of our biggest achievements is having created an atmosphere that something exciting was happening in Pennine Lancashire. Our audiences have continued to grow, not only in numbers but in diversity too!

44% of our audiences said they had not been to the theatre in the past 12 months



[‘It’s great to have something finally happening in Darwen’](#)

[A passerby, who after enjoying seeing circus skills in the town centre bought a ticket to ‘Circus Geeks’ at Darwen Library Theatre, March 2015](#)

Working with our Community Promoters

We couldn’t have made any of the Plugged In work work with out our dedicated volunteer Community Promoters. We worked with 180 year 5 pupils, youth groups, horticulturists, hospices and people passionate about the arts to put together groups of arts ambassadors. Choosing the shows which came to their venues and making sure every body found out about it. We proved that handing over the programming keys to the community works!



“We have a vision to widen our audience base to encompass more people who ‘think theatre is not for ordinary folk’ and to people who find it hard to get to performances for lack of a companion. We want to make Darwen Library Theatre accessible to a community of all ages and provide varied experiences. The Arts have so much to give in enhancing our lives as individuals and as a community. We want this to happen through Darwen Library Theatre and Plugged-in.”

Quote from Dorothy Shepherd, one of the lead members of the Darwen Library Theatre Community Promoters Group.

Working with our Venues

Just like our community promoters, our project couldn't have happened without the co operation of our venues and the wonderful work the staff have done with us! They've let us change opening times, decorate foyers, take audiences back stage, and completely rearrange their auditoriums! Proving that these venues, can be just as versatile as the most modern purpose built arts centres in the bigger cities.



“Plugged In is a fantastic programme which I’ve thoroughly enjoyed working with at the ACE Centre. Seeing the diverse crowds it’s brought in, brilliant theatre/shows and overall positivity from the Plugged In team has been excellent to see and much needed for a town like Nelson”

Quote from Christopher Storey, Head Technician at The ACE Centre

A message from Stephanie...

I can’t believe we’ve submitted our final report to the Arts Council for the first phase of Plugged In! In some ways it feels like I’ve been working on this project forever, and in others it doesn’t seem like 2 minutes since I was terrified of the idea of just picking one show to programme! I’ve got LITERALLY EVERYTHING crossed in the hope that we get the funding for Phase 2, not just because, I’m personally not ready to finish the project, but because all our audience feedback and results so far show that what we are doing is working, and this is only just the beginning!

If you want to read more about the work Plugged In has done, see more photos and find out why we started the project, [then head over to the Plugged In website.](#)

What it is like to have a job your Nan doesn’t understand...

Posted on April 3, 2015

Stephie

I don't come from an 'arty' family. My Mum is still disappointed that her love of football hasn't rubbed off on me, and when my Dad saw some contemporary dance once, he deduced that it must have been about soup. This is fine by me, sometimes I don't get contemporary dance either, and that piece may well have been about soup for all I could tell you, however, it does make explaining what I do for a living a little difficult.

Nobody struggles with understanding what I do, more than my Nan. She is still waiting for me to pop up in Eastenders, or Coronation Street and until I do, she will remain suspicious, and continue to ask me if I've 'found a proper job yet?' I can hardly blame her though. If you don't work in the arts, or have never really been involved in them, further than seeing your granddaughter in the community panto, then chances are the Arts as an industry remains a real mystery to you.

In many ways until I entered the world of work, the jobs that were open to me as a Theatre and English Literature Graduate were also a mystery. Something which deserves a whole blog post of it's



.....The.....

Grandma's



guide to



WORKING

.....IN THE ARTS.....

own, but today I'd rather focus on the positives of working in the arts. What is it like to have a job your Nan doesn't understand?

Well first things first, you should probably warn your Nan, that you're not necessarily going to be able to nip home for Sunday lunch every weekend. In my interview for this post, I was very politely warned 'you may have to work some evenings and weekends, is that ok?' to which my reply was 'I wasn't aware there were jobs where you didn't have to work evenings and weekends!' This is something which I think is becoming more and more common. Jobs these days are so rarely set office hours. My job is by no means 9-5, and this suits me to a T. I like being out hosting and attending exciting events on an evening, I would rather be doing that for a living than sitting at my desk five days a week. Of course there are some weeks where I am glued to my very comfortable office chair, but generally speaking, there is no such thing as average working hours.

Average in general is not something that applies to my job. 'What does your average day look like?' Well, erm...

By far the best thing about my job, is the sheer variety of STUFF I get to do. From teaching a primary school one afternoon, to meetings with bus companies the next, and finishing the week off, with a spot of juggling and interviews on the radio. No one day is ever the same. This means not only do I never get bored (something I suspect would happen very quickly if I ever did get one of those pesky 'real' jobs) but it also means every week, I learn something new, meet new people, begin new projects, and have new thoughts and conversations about the world and the role theatre and art play in it. Basically every week is a bit like starting a new job, but without the scary first day, the fear that you might not like your colleagues, or having to spend a morning reading and signing health and safety documents and contracts.

In conclusion, my Nan doesn't necessarily understand what I do, but that doesn't matter, I don't have the type of job where I can give a stock answer when she asks, so while the conversation may always start the same 'But what do you actually do?' Each week I get to give a different answer. It's no wonder my Nan doesn't ever feel like she has got to grips with my job, sometimes, I find it hard to believe that this is what I wake up in a morning and do! So while she may never understand why I'm the person that picks which shows go on, or why it is such an important skill to be able to make a puppet out of a wooden spoon, she does understand that I love my job, and when it comes down to it, that is what is really important, not only for working in the arts but for pursuing any type of career.

So if you ever are faced with a relative who just doesn't seem to get it, I know it can be infuriating, just remember it isn't what you do, but why you do it that really matters.

Thanks for reading, and if you're a Nan that understands arts jobs perfectly, if you could give mine a ring, it would be greatly appreciated!