

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
<b>Barbican Centre Board</b>	20 March 2024
<b>Subject: Theatre and Dance Annual Report</b>	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<b>3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10</b>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of: Claire Spencer, CEO, Barbican</b>	<b>For noting.</b>
<b>Report author: Toni Racklin, Head of Theatre and Dance, Barbican</b>	

### **Summary**

This paper outlines the past year's Theatre and Dance programming activities at the Barbican Centre, in the Barbican Theatre and The Pit. It also looks ahead to the future programme for both these spaces.

The Barbican Theatre and the Pit remain at the forefront of London's theatre landscape, recognised for bold, daring productions that focus strongly on equality and inclusion, representing women and global majority decision makers, those engaged with the climate crisis and personal identity and socially relevant themes. The multi-disciplinary drive of the overall arts programme has always been at the heart of our work and is now held by the Barbican-wide purpose and values and new Strategic Framework which guide our ideas and strengthen our ambition.

### **Recommendation(s)**

That the Board NOTE the report.

## Main Report

### Background

**We are London's creative catalyst for arts, curiosity and enterprise. We spark creative possibilities and transformation for artists, audiences and communities – to inspire, connect and provoke debate. We are the place to be in this Destination City, where everyone is welcome. Our impact is felt far outside our walls and ripples before the experiences we offer – locally, nationally and internationally.**

### Barbican Theatre and the Pit

Our theatre spaces are home to ambitious and original performances from around the world, including plays, physical theatre, puppetry, music theatre, contemporary dance and classical ballet. Framed by the clarity of our new Barbican-wide values and purpose and strategic framework, our local, national and international collaborations present bold perspectives and amplify vital new voices.

We work in close partnership with our Artistic Associates and longstanding, regular visiting companies— while continuing to build our network of new national and international partners. We commission and champion these artists because they challenge what performance can be, and they embrace innovative ways of working. Our Open Lab and Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award programmes give early and mid-career artists time and space to test out new ideas, and our artist-curated Pit Parties nurture creative talent from under-represented groups. We offer a range of accessible performances, in-depth learning opportunities and discounted Young Barbican tickets across our programme to welcome as many people as possible.

To seek out work we welcome artists' submissions and travel to festivals and international venues and share ideas with a wide range of peer colleagues. Our programme in the main Barbican Theatre focuses on large-scale international artists and UK artists with an international profile, in a seamless fusion of own promotions and commercial rentals. In the Pit we support smaller scale productions and work in progress by exciting theatre makers who have been traditionally underrepresented on London stages.

Two leading directors have submitted their work with these encouraging endorsements: *“There are very few institutions who might be able to pull off an ambitious project like this, but I instantly thought of you.....”*

*“...with your commitment to explore new forms of multidisciplinary theatre and tradition in experiment and exploration .....”*

### 2023

Purposeful programming, excellence in production, talent development, income generation, collaborations with artistic associates and nurturing new partnerships drive every choice we make for the programme.

Fundraising supports the management of our annual theatre and dance department budget, that is a mixed ecology of investment in our own promotions against box office income plus rental income.

Last year we successfully raised nearly £100k in grants from the **Bagri Foundation** and **Canadian High Commission** (Mahabarata), **the Maria Bjornson Memorial Fund** (Belarus Free Theatre), **the Polonsky Foundation** (Cheek by Jowl), **SAHA** (Transpose), **PACE** (El Patio Teatro), and **the French Institute** (Stereoptik and Les Antliaclasses) inspired by the programme content.

Iconic British companies, **Complicite**, **Cheek by Jowl**, **Headlong**, **Giles Terrera** with **Bristol Old Vic**, **Inua Ellams** and **Told by an Idiot** stood alongside new and returning international artists; **Pam Tanowitz**, **Trajal Harrel**, both from the USA, South Korea's **Eun-Me An**, **Belarus Free Theatre**, and Canada's **Why Not Theatre** with their stunning retelling of the Mahabarata.

**Trafalgar Entertainment** brought *A Strange Loop* direct from Broadway for an exciting and ground-breaking summer season and the **RSC** returned in the autumn with an extended, second run of the multi-award winning *My Neighbour Totoro*.

Our programme content addresses some of the most topical issues that are connecting to audiences. We are seeing artists currently creating work around issues relating to personal identity; who we are and what is our place in the world; the meaning of home and heritage; and love for our planet. The interpretation of these themes has come in many inspiring forms this past year on both the epic and small scale.

Our primary **challenges** this past year, which will continue into this, are:

- Changing consumer behaviour - Late bookers mean that we are having to learn how to hold our nerve.
- Continuously benchmarking and monitoring our ticket prices to ensure we can achieve target, but also being responsive to dynamic pricing (up and down) and accessibility (this year we have succeeded in reaching our box office income targets).
- Being mindful of our place in the theatre and dance ecology in the aftermath of the pandemic and government funding cuts, which have seriously disrupted the wider arts sector.
- Being alive to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis which has seen our costs for transport, freight, fees, accommodation, casual staff, and physical assets all nearly double. Balancing our budgets but striving to ensure our programme remains accessible to the broadest possible audience.

## **2024**

Acknowledging the challenges above and taking new learnings forward, we are clear as to why our programme structure has had to change, and if we compare the breakdown of weeks in this year's main theatre with those of 2019, pre-pandemic, we can see how the balance has shifted between own promotion weeks with those of our commercial partners:

## 2019

26 weeks own promotions (including Barbican Business Events and technical rehearsals)

14 weeks RSC

8 weeks summer musical Regent's Park Open Air Theatre

4 weeks maintenance

## 2024

8 weeks own promotions

24 weeks RSC

17 weeks summer musical Trafalgar Entertainment

3 weeks maintenance

This year is the first year of our new 3-year relationship with Trafalgar Entertainment and this summer will see a joyous, new production of **Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate***, directed by **Bart Sher**. As part of this arrangement, we will be working together to develop new musicals and plays, the first three of which have research and development time scheduled in the Pit, potentially allowing us to grow new work for subsequent summer seasons here, or elsewhere. This new relationship gives us an added boost in both financial and programming stability for the next few years and the security to consider how to continue to be daring in shaping the whole programme in the future.

For this spring, we have commissioned world premieres of new choreography from **Boy Blue** and **Ballet Black**, and welcome French star, **Isabelle Huppert** with legendary American director, **Robert Wilson**, back to our stage for a monumental solo show about the doomed Mary, Queen of Scots.

It is not often that we are able to revive a Pit show but the extraordinary originality and imagination of ***Perfect Show for Rachel*** (winner of last year's Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award) by **ZooCo** and **Improbable Theatre**, a joyful show that loudly champions access, demanded to be seen more widely.

**Under Embargo** for autumn 2024 is work from the UK, the Middle East, South Korea and South Africa, plus a winter season of bold classics from the RSC.

In parallel with the challenges we know face us, we also have a number of **opportunities** to fulfil in the year ahead:

- The provision of a travel budget allows us to fully receive incoming shows so that we can flag in advance any potential ethical or audience engagement issues, allowing us to execute care with care and professionalism, and to ensure we prepare meticulously for technical adaptations. It allows us to keep abreast of new movements in drama and dance and to learn first-hand about unfamiliar artists and it furnishes us with ideas and inspiration to plan effectively.
- We continue to feel the ongoing and renewed enthusiasm post-pandemic for in person, participatory and relevant performance experiences and we

are working hard to best capture this momentum.

- We are energetically working collaboratively across the art forms to create a compelling funding story for our Development colleagues to be able to reintroduce Open labs, support our ambitions for the programme and to help resource refreshed plans for future artistic associates.

## **2025**

Plans for this year are currently under embargo but will feature an international season of own promotions, a summer musical and a winter season from the RSC plus a full season of performances and research and development in the Pit.

## **2026**

A myriad of exciting proposals and innovative submissions are lined up that could form the programme for this future year. But we will take a pause now, as we wait for the new Director for Arts and Participation to join us, so we can carefully plan and consider together the shape of our programme, to ensure we are fully aligned to our purpose and values, that our strategic objective priorities are in place, and that we will be reflecting the city and times we live in.

### **Open Lab current status**

The Centre's goal of fuelling creative ambition is reflected in the Pit's programme. However now that we have lost our ACE NPO status we can no longer run the Open Lab programme. Traditionally, ACE funding of £35k was used to support a cohort of 6 artists/companies for a yearlong programme which was a key industry driver for artist development. It included time in the Pit theatre with full technical support, mentoring, training, a public facing showcase, access to other Barbican events and networking opportunities.

It is considered a great loss to the wider landscape to no longer be able to provide this important opportunity. We are working closely with Development to approach trusts and foundations to find new ways to support this work in the future. And as one of our main Strategic Objectives is Developing Artistic Talent, all art forms are working closely together to revisit our approach to supporting exciting emerging talent in a holistic way, and to make a compelling new case for funding.

As testament to the value and impact of the Open Lab scheme we included 5 companies: **Rachel Mars, Pappy Show, Rhiannon Faith, emma+pj** and **Julene Robinson**, alumni of the Lab programme, into last year's public facing Pit season, to much acclaim. Our technical team were also able to work in a more hands-on, creative way to support the artists by designing lighting, sound, video, and staging, which in turn, gave them crucial developmental opportunities.

### **Artistic Associates and cross arts collaboration**

Our Strategic Objective of Collaboration requires us to carefully consider the relationships with all our existing Artistic Associates across the artforms and ensure they align with our values and where necessary look to redraw relationships for the next chapter. This work is in train but needs more time and further discussion before any significant action can be taken.

Our two main Theatre and Dance associates are **Boy Blue**, whose world premiere, *Cycles*, we are about to welcome this May and **Cheek by Jowl**, who are developing an international Shakespeare project for 2026.

Sharing theatre spaces with our art form colleagues sees a number of opportunities emerging and coming to fruition:

- Theatre and **Cinema** will showcase a celebrated director across stage and screen in 2024;
- **Creative Collaborations** will occupy the Pit for periods each year;
- **Barbican Immersive** is investigating the Pit for 2025;
- a large-scale **Visual Arts** project is heading for the main stage in 2026;
- and together with **Music** we are looking at several crossover dance and live orchestra projects.

### **Creative Collaborations**

The newly structured department is currently developing a series of workshops and insight experiences for primary and secondary school partners responding to RSC's *My Neighbour Totoro*; in the pipeline are collaborations with Boy Blue for a weekend public programme and there will be support for ZooCo and Improbable's series of theatre-making workshops on the themes brought to light in *Perfect Show* for Rachel. We are in the process of discussing future projects for the autumn and beyond.

### **Media**

Between March 2023 – Feb 2024 we can identify over 1000 pieces of published editorial coverage for the theatre and dance programme (covering TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, websites, newsletters and social media packages) with an estimated AVE of £3,337,120. We secured coverage from a diverse range of journalists throughout the year, including every national paper sending a critic to see *A Strange Loop* and x 65 4\* & 5\* reviews overall.

Alongside challenges across all parts of the sector, the media landscape in relation to arts and culture has shifted and there has been a notable decline in column inches/ website sections and posts, dedicated arts journalists, or commissions for freelance arts writers and broadcasters. However, we are still able to secure high quality national and international feature coverage and reviews for our projects featuring well known artists that can be seen on tour and are here for longer runs.

### **Marketing**

Our average first-time booker rate for all shows last year was 32%.

Our top events for bringing in new audiences last year were Why Not Company's *Mahabarata* (42%), Julene Robinson's *The Night Woman* (42%), Ballet Black's *Pioneers* (39%), Transpose (37%), Belarus Free Theatre's *King Stakh's Wild Hunt* (32%), and the summer rental *A Strange Loop* (47%) reflecting their appeal to diverse, younger audiences which are priority areas of our new audience strategy. Our reporting also shows that many first-time audience members have returned to enjoy Gallery exhibitions as well as other theatre and dance events.

This year we have run over 27 strategic and creative marketing campaigns to promote the theatre season. With such a varied programme that attracts a diverse range of audience, our focus is on developing campaigns that connect with new audiences. Key audiences we've focussed on this year include those from South and South East Asia, Black, LGBTQI+, Polish and Belarusian backgrounds.

We regularly conduct outreach through platforms like Afridisiak, People of Theatre, Black Ticket Project, and Lovers of Black Theatre, which cater to global majority audiences, further expanding our reach.

This year the marketing team have worked diligently to enhance accessibility, clarifying our Access offerings online and through regular newsletters. Collaborating with an Access influencer on promotions for My Neighbour Totoro was a particular highlight.

Despite the challenges posed by the sway towards last-minute bookings becoming the norm, our ticket sales have remained robust over the past year. Our theatre programme continues to resonate with audiences, and our marketing strategies consistently meet financial and capacity targets. Moving forward, we acknowledge the need for agility in planning campaigns and allocating resources to adapt to evolving audience booking patterns.

### **Sustainability and Climate Change**

Appendix 4 attached sets out the work that each of our technical departments have carried out to improve sustainability in their particular area. Additionally, we actively participate in the Theatre Green Book initiatives, prioritising energy saving and recycling. We mutually share new sustainable practices and 'green riders' with our visiting companies, encouraging train over air travel, requesting them to only use wood from sustainable trees, to control the amount of plastic used, to learn more about their recycling policies, and to encouraging the use of clean vehicles for deliveries of sets and equipment. Admin, Marketing and Box Office are all substantially reducing print assets and we benefit from the use of e-tickets, digital contracts and digital show programmes as well as being able to upload interesting content on our website or contact our audiences with updated info quickly and efficiently through pre-show emails.

Artistic endeavour reflecting the climate crisis is now coming to the fore and in the past couple of years we have co-commissioned **David Finnigan's *You're Safe Till 2024***; **Complicite's *Can I Live?*** for COP26 and ***Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*** directed by **Simon McBurney**; and **Headlong's *Play for the Living in the Time of Extinction*** powered by 10 on-stage cyclists, directed by **Katie Mitchell**. Future productions on these topics are in the pipeline and we are in conversations with environmental groups to learn more and share ideas.

### **Renewal**

Members of our department are actively involved in contributing to the working groups set up for the Renewal process that will directly affect the Theatre's future operation.

### **Department colleagues**

Now that working from home and flexible working patterns are understood and inbuilt into our culture, the evidence of productivity and wellbeing are reflected on our day-to-day operations. Our shows dictate the need to be physically present in the venue and there are designated times across each week where everyone is present for key meetings, either departmentally or Centre wide. Everyone is very clear of their own role, able to work independently knowing they are part of a supportive team, who always deliver shows on time but can cover their peers or step up as needed. We cannot underestimate the impact on mental and physical health that these past few years have had.

All our recently vacant technical posts are now filled by committed and enthusiastic new colleagues. We are currently recruiting for two Assistant Producers and one Production Assistant. Previous team members held considerable organisational knowledge, but we are prepared and proactive in building in handover time to support new staff onboard successfully. These three roles require some experience of having worked in a theatre setting, but they also offer opportunities for growth and development while training in post.

Members of the Theatre team with colleagues from Creative Collaborations have been actively engaged in the setting up of the future new apprenticeship scheme. Some team members are on Strategic Framework and Renewal working groups and others are members of the Staff Diversity Networks.

### **Equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility**

The presence of this department brings huge support, expertise and important perspectives to our work. The new team who lead on the EDI and Zero Tolerance strategies and the new Anti-racism Action Plan, challenge and strengthen us. We seek their advice regularly on matters related to programme content, personnel issues, and challenging incidents.

With their input we can carefully and confidently proceed with access performances, care and wellbeing training and check wording for signage and emails to ensure we are acting with understanding and respect. This helps us immeasurably with the delivery of shows such as Perfect Show for Rachel, Transpose, A Strange Loop, Pit Parties and all our accompanying access performances that welcome disabled and d/Deaf audiences and artists. This work that we undertake together ensures our own staff feel properly briefed and equipped to undertake their roles and that learnings are shared across the wider teams.

### **Corporate and Strategic implications**

The future plans of the Theatre and Dance team support the delivery of the City's Corporate Plan by:

**Contributing to a flourishing society.** Fulfilling our values, we aim for our theatre and dance programme to be accessible and inclusive. To offer enriching experiences for those both watching the work and participating in events. We provide a platform for new work to thrive and grow and present work for and by global majority and disabled artists and audiences and our ticket pricing is mindful of the cost-of-living

crisis to make it accessible for low income audience members and to young people.

### **Relevant Corporate Plan Outcomes**

- People are safe and feel safe.
- People enjoy good health and wellbeing through engagement in the joyful collective experience of film viewing.
- People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential.
- Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need.

**Supporting a thriving economy.** We work to a financial ecology of own promotions and commercial rentals to support the programme alongside a contribution of core City funding for the operational running of the department. We are entrepreneurial in our negotiations and seek fair and equitable contract arrangements with all our visiting artists. We work closely with the Development team to seek new fundraising opportunities and are active ambassadors, working hard to promote our programme and the Centre wherever we may be travelling.

#### **Relevant Corporate Plan outcomes:**

- We are a global hub for innovation in finance and professional services, commerce, and culture.
  - We have access to the skills and talent we need
- **Shaping outstanding environments.** We are working hard to maintain our venues to as high as standard as possible while handling issues related to their ageing infrastructure. Along with this is our commitment to environmental concerns, through the artistic programme and to manage our carbon footprint. We welcome the Renewal work that has started and actively participate in these early planning stages.

#### **Relevant Corporate Plan outcomes:**

- We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity, and collaboration.
  - Our spaces are resilient, secure, and well maintained.
- **Financial implications**  
As outlined in the separate financial report, provided at the March Finance and Risk Sub Committee of the Barbican Board.
  - **Resource implications**  
As outlined in the report
  - **Legal implications**  
None

## **Risk implications**

We work carefully to monitor and mitigate financial and reputational risk across the programme, seeking advice and expertise from senior colleagues and outside advisors.

- **Equalities implications**

As outlined in the report

- **Climate implications**

As outlined in the report

- **Security implications**

We seek additional support, as required, from our Security team in response to rigorous research and full discussion with senior colleagues of current situations that might directly affect our artists, audiences and staff.

## **Conclusion**

Reflecting on the UK theatre's current position, it's clear that despite challenges, our strategic direction, commitment to inclusivity, and innovative programming have fostered a positive return of audiences. As we move forward, we remain dedicated to exploring new revenue streams, enhancing audience experiences, and supporting the creative purpose and values of the Barbican and aligning with the City's objectives to cultivate a flourishing society and robust economy.

By continuing to provide the strong presence of our much-loved, ground-breaking artists, as well as by introducing exciting new work and striving to support the artists of tomorrow, we aim to make a meaningful contribution to our community and industry.

This past challenging time is still taking its toll, and we know that we have much more to learn and must remain kind and understanding of one another. New working patterns are contributing positively to the wellbeing of our team, and it is helpful to everyone that our programming structure is clear and cohesive. There is much demand from artists to participate on our stages that we are extremely grateful for, and we remain committed to our remit to provide the best work from around the world. We work hard to actively contribute to income generation whilst also focussing on giving our audiences thrilling and memorable experiences. This work is made possible by the commitment of a fantastic team and the unwavering support of leadership and colleagues across the Centre.

The Daily Telegraph recommends the **Barbican Centre** saying '*The Barbican is London's carbuncular, agenda-setting home to the arts, theatre, cinema, classical music, and dance. Oh, and a tropical conservatory, for good measure. The brutalist architecture of the Barbican divided Londoners when it opened in 1982, but today it is perhaps one of the most adored monuments in the capital – a creative-minded lego-brick among a sea of soulless shards of glass*'. **15 January 2024**

**Report author.**

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Appendix 1: Non-Public section – Theatre and Dance report, March 2024

Appendix 2: Awards and nominations

Appendix 3: Show of the Year – Critics' recommendations

Appendix 4: Review Highlights

Appendix 5: Access performances