

# GRAEae

THEATRE COMPANY

**‘A company of disabled artists that is constantly pushing against expectations and at theatrical boundaries.’**

Lyn Gardner, The Guardian



**[www.graeae.org](http://www.graeae.org)**

**Graeae Theatre Company, Bradbury Studios, 138 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DY**



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

**Graeae is a force for change in world-class theatre, boldly placing D/deaf and disabled actors centre stage and challenging preconceptions.**

## **Vision and Mission:**

- 1 Create world-class theatre:** produce and tour high quality, high impact theatre that is unmistakably Graeae's, providing a platform for the skill, vision and excellence of D/deaf and disabled artists
- 2 Find new audiences:** for Graeae and for the wider industry. Ensure the work has a lasting impact across England, unleashing creativity in regions and communities, working with groups that have little access to art and culture and on a variety of platforms
- 3 Champion accessibility:** through partnerships with the wider theatre sector on national and international platforms creating, operating, supporting and advising on accessible environments and practice
- 4 Nurture talent:** create a programme of inclusive training and education activities. Enable emerging and professional D/deaf and disabled artists to shine, through a programme that engages and inspires
- 5 Promote excellent governance** and leadership across the company
- 6 Diversify and collaborate:** invest in partnerships, share resources and identify diverse income streams to reduce reliance on public subsidy and ensure a stable base for future growth

**'Pretty much the blueprint for what I wish mainstream British Theatre was like.'**

**Andrew Haydon, Postcards from the Gods**

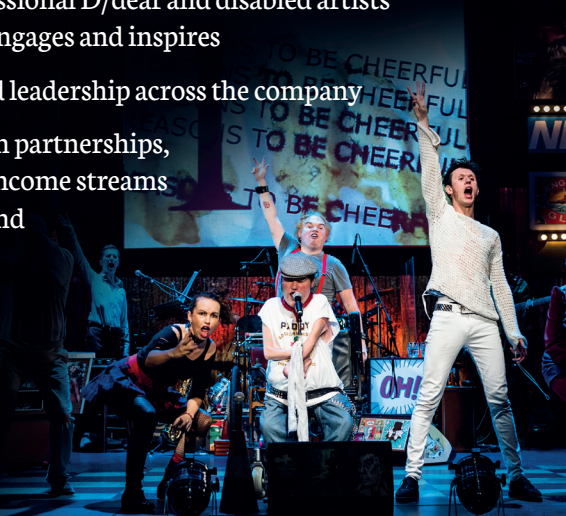
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Reg Charity no. 284589, Reg in England no. 1619794, VAT no. 628 4448 20

Images: *Reasons to be Cheerful* 2017, front photo: Becky Bailey, above photo: Patrick Baldwin



# Welcome

**GRAEae**  
THEATRE COMPANY

## **I truly love my job and it is a huge privilege to be Graeae's CEO and Artistic Director.**

The core team and Board have endless creativity, tenacity, engagement, wisdom and wit and together we are a company that constantly evolves, takes on tough challenges and never go for the easy option or path of least resistance. We have always shared - and continue to share - best artistic practice. We aspire to create the most aesthetically accessible productions, providing new territory for discovering different approaches to access so that no one Graeae show is ever the same.



We are a hugely ambitious company, but I am mindful of our place within the theatre ecology. The fact that artists come to us with passion, energy and a desire to learn informs our casting instinct; we work through rehearsals to give people the skills and confidence they need, not just for Graeae but for the wider world. We open doors for actors to then go on to work with major repertory theatres who, in turn, can open bigger doors.

We are living in fragile times and everywhere D/deaf and disabled people are fighting cuts and for basic survival. Graeae is needed more than ever to create political platforms through artistic engagement and to be visible, reminding people - we are here and we ain't going anywhere! We refuse to be relegated to the sidelines.

As such, this is dedicated to the memory of several dear friends, artists and collaborators we've lost over the last year.

*Jenny Sealey MBE, Artistic Director/CEO*



# Productions

Graeae's productions are instantly identifiable. Whether it is an adaptation of Lorca, a new play by an emerging artist or a rabble-rousing musical, Graeae bring something new to every show they do. Ambition, mischief, and true representation of society on stage draw people from around the world to our productions.

**'Graeae, a company of D/deaf and disabled performers whose raison d'être is to embrace and celebrate difference.'**

*The Guardian, on The House of Bernarda Alba*

Over the last four decades, Graeae's team have been applying their creativity and innovation to ensuring audiences, whether they are D/deaf, disabled or non-disabled, are treated as equals. By taking functional access such as British Sign Language, audio description and captioning and bringing it as a creative force central to the performance, Graeae has defined a new way of telling stories on stage. We feel it enhances the enjoyment for all audience members and we coined the term 'the aesthetics of access' to describe this process.

We feel great pride knowing that this style of communication, in which access is woven through the narrative, the design and the performances from day one of rehearsal, is now being embraced by the wider industry.



Images: left *Reasons to be Cheerful* 2017, photo: Patrick Baldwin  
right *Cosmic Scallies* 2017, photo: Jonathan Keenan



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## **We place access for D/deaf and disabled people at the heart of everything, both on and off the stage.**

From large-scale touring productions to outdoor festivals, we strive to seamlessly weave audio description, captioning and British Sign Language interpretation into the creative vision for each piece. As leaders of the field in creating accessible performance, we continue to push boundaries and explore new ways to integrate elements of accessibility into our work.

Creative access is woven through our training and education programmes. From The Rollettes' onstage 'Access Space Hamster' to their tactile Christmas tree, our Young Artistic Advisors lead the way in finding new and exciting ways of making their work accessible to performers and audiences alike.

Access is provided throughout our marketing materials, including through British Sign Language and audio flyers. Then, from the moment audience members arrive at a venue they can explore tactile set models, read an Easy Read synopsis, or receive their programme in different formats. We share our knowledge and passion with front of house and box office teams and marketing staff at the across the country, providing support, sewing seeds of change, and demystifying the process of becoming more accessible.

Graeae's commitment to beautiful accessible environments extends to its home in Hackney, Bradbury Studios. Over 7,000 visitors a year enjoy the building's rehearsal room, meeting spaces and offices which have been designed to offer equal access to all. Features such as wide corridors, natural light, textured flooring and way-finding aids make Bradbury Studios a shining example of how accessibility can be creatively integrated into beautiful design.

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# Championing Accessibility

We are unflinching in our commitment to accessibility for our artists as well as for our audiences. We work with a brilliant team of Sign Language Interpreters, access support workers, audio describers and creative enablers and pride ourselves on being an accessible, supportive environment for the D/deaf and disabled practitioners who come through our doors and who work with us in the wider world.



Images: above left, audio description during *Blood Wedding* 2015, photo: Ross Fraser Mclean  
right, access support during the *Ensemble* training programme, photos: Becky Bailey



**Graeae champions creative platforms for D/deaf and disabled artists, children and young people through our productions, training and creative learning projects.**

## Collaborations with Young People

We have a strong track record in working inclusively and collaboratively across a range of learning environments. Our projects encourage children and young people to be curious, challenge perceptions, and help us all make sense of the world.

**Our participation programmes include:**

- Young Artistic Advisors - Graeae's young company
- Artistic Residencies and Teachers INSET for schools
- Production-related workshops
- Other bespoke workshops and performance projects

**'I've watched other people doing this [performing on stage], but I never thought it would actually be me.'**

*Young Artistic Advisor*



Image: *The Limbless Knight* 2013, photo: Patrick Baldwin



## Nurturing Talent

**Our artist development programmes include and have included:**

- Continuing Professional Development courses in acting, directing and aerial training
- **Ensemble** - a pioneering training programme for D/deaf and disabled young people (aged 17-30)
- Training courses and creation labs in Brazil, Albania, Turkey, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Japan, and Australia

**‘It’s this kind of inclusive environment which reinforces that equality really does mean we ALL belong in the same room, the same play, the same world.’ Artist**

## Creating waves of change

Graeae is a company that is driven by a passion for artistic excellence and for justice and human rights. We believe great art is and should be for everyone. We deliver creative training courses and consultancy to arts venues, theatre companies and the corporate sector, through our unique *Dare You* training programme.

**Our sector training and consultancy offers include:**

- Front of House training
- Accessible Marketing training
- ‘*Dare You*’ - leadership training for a wide range of organisations and its employees
- Aesthetics of Access workshops and courses
- Teachers’ INSET

To get involved contact Jodi-Alissa Bickerton,  
Creative Learning Director  
[jodi@graeae.org](mailto:jodi@graeae.org)



Image: The Rollettes, photo: Richard Matthews

## **We are always on the lookout for new and exciting voices and stories.**

Our flagship writer development programme **Write to Play** nurtures and develops five new D/deaf and disabled writers each year, in partnership with some of the most exciting new writing theatres and theatre companies in the UK.

**Write to Play** graduates have gone on to write for theatre and television, secure commissions and agents, lead writing workshops and develop theatre companies of their own. In summer 2017, we produced *Cosmic Scallies*, the first play by year two **Write to Play** graduate Jackie Hagan.

Running alongside **Write to Play**, **Play Labs** offer artists a one-day opportunity to explore an idea in an early phase of development, while **Play Chats** offer writers at the beginning of their career the chance to find out more about playwriting and how to begin to grow their ideas.



# New Writing

New writing commissions include work by Jackie Hagan, Jo Clifford, Jack Thorne, David Ireland, Mike Kenny and Matilda Ibini among others. The work has taken many forms - from new writing to adaptations and outdoor work to new plays for young performers.

Our writer development programmes would not be possible without the generous support of our funders, The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Awards For All, Backstage Trust, Noël Coward Trust, John Ellerman Foundation and The Charter 600 Charity.



Image: Audience at a **Write to Play** sharing



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**Esmée  
Fairbairn**  
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## Ensemble Training Programme

**A pioneering training programme for the next generation of D/deaf and disabled theatremakers.**

In response to barriers faced by many D/deaf and disabled artists, and the lack of diversity within the theatre climate, Graeae's groundbreaking new work-based training programme launched its six-month pilot in October 2015. Over this period, six artists undertook intensive acting and theatre-making training with highly qualified freelance drama school practitioners and mentors.

Features of the **Ensemble** training programme include performance training, devising new work, touring productions and running workshops. Professional development and employment opportunities are also offered beyond the programme.

**'I have grown more than I could have imagined...  
This was the best way to start my career as an actor.'**

*Joshua King, Ensemble Artist 2015-16*

## The Future

We will continue to ignite the careers for young theatre makers in fresh and exciting ways; from short courses, to broader production experience and freelance opportunities. Classic and formal drama training immersed with the raw, the maverick, the unseen, and the new perspectives of the world now.

We need to continue to be pioneering in how we are making theatre together, experimenting with access tools, digital technology on and off stage.

**For more information on the Ensemble programme,  
email Jodi-Alissa Bickerton, Creative Learning Director on  
jodi@graeae.org or call 020 7613 6900.**

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## David Young

### Ensemble Artist 2015/16

As a young emerging artist, finding the right training is a hard task. When you add into that a physical disability like mine, the idea of getting professional training in the arts becomes an impossible task and horrifically daunting.

When I saw the advert about the **Ensemble** programme, my initial thought was 'oh look, that's a brilliant opportunity...for someone else'. Being a wheelchair user and needing support 24 hours a day makes it hard for me to think about living anywhere but within my own home. But I continued dreaming about this opportunity and talked to Graeae, as well as talking to the people around me about living away from home and getting proper arts training. Slowly people came on board with the idea, this dream grew and I got an audition.

I got the news from Graeae on a cold autumn day. The dream grew a little more real and it eventually became a reality. I was off to London to train with Graeae.

The **Ensemble** programme was fantastic. There was a diverse range of subjects from Shakespeare to physical theatre, social change to theatre design. My favourite was improvisation where we could spend the afternoons pretending to be in whatever world we had created as a group.

The **Ensemble** programme ended with a professional showcase at Soho Theatre and since then Graeae have been within reach whenever I've come up against barriers. Through the mentoring as part of **Ensemble**, I have been able to figure out who I am as an artist. I am now working as a director and creative assistant. I am able to take all of the knowledge and all of the support to make my own world and continue creating in my own way.

Image: *Ensemble* participant, David Young, photo: Becky Bailey



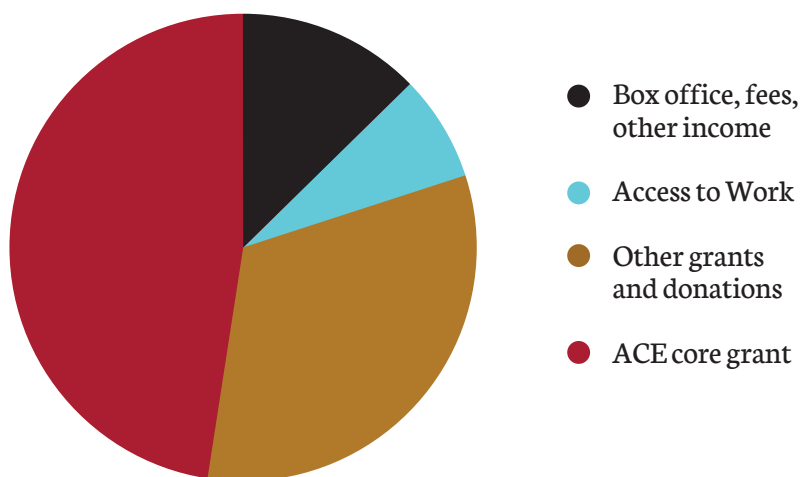
Ensemble 2015-16 artist Kellan Frankland.  
(photo: Becky Bailey). Inset: Kellan as Martirio in the  
Graeae/Royal Exchange Theatre production of  
*The House of Bernarda Alba* (photo: Jonathan Keenan).



## Financial year ended 31 March 2017 (2016-17)

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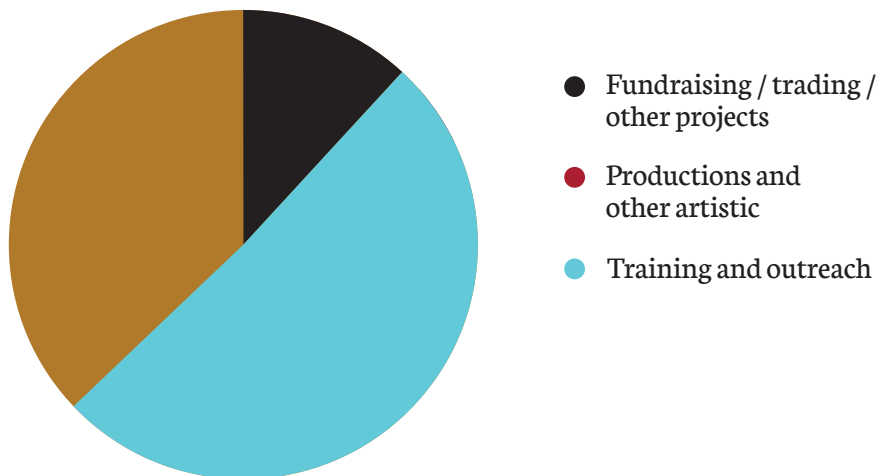
### 2016-17 Income



### Where the money comes from:

- 48%** Arts Council England provides core revenue funding for Graeae.
  - 32%** Trusts, foundations and individual donations provide essential funding for Graeae's productions, training and outreach programmes.
  - 7%** Funds from the Department of Work and Pensions **Access to Work** scheme support the access costs for disabled people in employment.
  - 13%** Box office and venue fees, fees from training and workshops, and the hire of space and equipment make up the balance of Graeae's income.
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## 2016-17 Expenditure



## Financial activities for 2016-17 £

<b>Income</b>	<b>+1,185,868</b>
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Share of the costs of buildings and equipment allocated to 2016-17 (depreciation)	- 86,901
Other costs	<u>- 896,783</u>

<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>-983,684</b>
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Transfers to restricted and designated funds	<u>-100,196</u>
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<b>Added to unrestricted general funds (reserves)</b>	<b><u>+101,988</u></b>
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**Note:** a separate heading of Governance is not required under SORP 2015

For further information see the 2016-17 financial statements for Graeae on the Charity Commission website or contact [info@graeae.org](mailto:info@graeae.org) for a copy. The opinion of the statutory auditor on the 2016-17 financial statements was unqualified.

## Blood Wedding

**By Federico García Lorca in a new version by David Ireland from the original translation by Sarah Wright**

This landmark production of Lorca's classic was co-produced with Dundee Rep and Derby Theatre and transposed the setting from the stifling heat of Spain to a gritty, urban location, where tensions at a wedding party spiralled into tragedy. Described by director Jenny Sealey as the 'ultimate soap-opera' our method of integrating British Sign Language, captioning and audio description created a show that was intense, energising and captivating.

**'I was struck by the realisation that Graeae are pretty much the blueprint for what I wish mainstream British Theatre was like. I look forward to the day when this level of textual and visual interrogation of a piece, and this extent of diversity-of-casting, comes as standard in British theatre.'**

*Andrew Haydon, Postcards from the Gods*

★★★★ 'Audio description, BSL interpretation and captioning are all used in the production but the real skill here is that none of it feels like an add-on. It's a triumph... another groundbreaking production from Graeae.'

*The Stage*





## EJ Raymond

### Cast member, *Blood Wedding*

When I was a student in college studying Performing Arts, I was surfing online looking for disabled-friendly theatre companies and Graeae was one on the search list. And I thought: 'I gotta work for Graeae one day, someday!'

And I did, 12 years later!

I had met some of the Graeae team before, but this time I was offered a role in one of their productions, *Blood Wedding*. I found developing my character of Agnes (Groom's mother) a big challenge, especially adapting the sign language from my local dialect (Scottish) to hers, but Jenny Sealey was so fantastic to work with, as was Nicola Miles-Wildin (the Assistant Director) and all the crew.

What I love about Graeae is that they ensure every play they produce is as accessible as possible, with audio description for blind and visually impaired audiences, captions for a hard of hearing audience and British Sign Language for a Deaf audience. They also ensure that we as actors are so comfortable in rehearsals, on stage and on tour. As the only profoundly Deaf actor in the cast, they also ensured all my access requirements were met.

I really enjoyed every second of my work with Graeae and didn't get any 'feeling alone moments!' Sometimes I forgot that I'm Deaf! I was so gutted when *Blood Wedding* ended in Liverpool; however, I hope to work with Graeae again in the near future.



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Image: *Blood Wedding* 2015, photo: Viktoria Begg





Image: *Blood Wedding 2015*, photo: Viktoria Begg

**Graeae's international work is going from strength to strength in developing extraordinary creative exchanges, all of which offer a profound learning experience.**

In Bangladesh, we have cast our ensemble for the production of *A different Romeo and Juliet*, which will take place in March 2016. The main characters are played by two performers each - one disabled actor who speaks and one Deaf actor using Bengali Sign Language. It will be the first time anything like this has been staged there.

In Brazil, we have had taster workshops with circus company Circo Crescer e Viver with the ambition to set up an intensive training programme for Deaf and disabled people. The aim is for their performers to be skilled up ready for the Olympic and Paralympic opening ceremonies, a model similar to the one run by National Centre for Circus Arts in 2012.

And in Karachi, we have been working alongside the British Council Pakistan Arts team for the development of a pioneering inclusive performing arts training programme, in collaboration with Deaf schools and local theatre artists. The programme is being developed through consultation and training with teachers and artists, as well as artistic residencies with young Deaf and disabled students who are aspiring to contribute to the arts and cultural landscape of a thriving artistic community in Karachi.

*Jenny Sealey MBE*  
*Artistic Director/CEO*

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# International 2014-15

## Training and Workshops



Image: Training and Workshop, British Council, photo: Cine Kitchen



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Image:  
Jenny Sealey directing *Romeo and Juliet* in Bangladesh for *A Different Shakespeare*  
photo: Tareque Mehdi

## The Solid Life of Sugar Water

By Jack Thorne, directed by Amit Sharma

**A Graeae Theatre Company and  
Theatre Royal Plymouth co-production.**

A tender, compelling and unsettling play, *The Solid Life of Sugar Water* follows the journey of a young couple, Phil and Alice, as they attempt to reconnect with each other following a stillbirth. This play about love, loss and recovery by award-winning writer Jack Thorne, directed by Graeae's Associate Director Amit Sharma, marked the company's return to the Edinburgh Fringe for the first time in 10 years, as well as Graeae's first ever production at the National Theatre. The show received unanimous acclaim amongst press and audiences alike, as well as winning the Euan's Guide Award for Most Accessible Production at the Fringe.

A documentary entitled *#SugarWater* was also made, by Breakneck Films, charting the journey of Graeae for the first time at the National Theatre. It has subsequently been chosen as an Official Selection for the St Louis Film Festival and Glasgow Film Festival. A public London screening was also held at the Genesis Cinema, Mile End in December 2017.

★★★★★ 'Sweet and funny moments abound in Jack Thorne's script. They are beautifully fielded by Genevieve Barr (Alice) and Arthur Hughes (Phil) who present every stage of the couple's relationship with warmth and disarming candor.'

*The Observer*



## Genevieve Barr

### Cast member, *The Solid Life of Sugar Water*

My first time working with Graeae - playing Alice in *The Solid Life of Sugar Water* - was unforgettable - in ambition, scale and success. Graeae have a real ability to bring together some fantastic people.

When I sat myself down for a Skype audition in an internet cafe in the middle of my time off travelling, I had little indication of the rollercoaster that was going to be the next two years of my life. The scale of the project just kept on growing - from a run in Plymouth, to selling out at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, to a UK tour culminating at the National Theatre (an actor's Field of Dreams). Lily Arnold's wonderful design posited a bed on a wall, enabling the audience to look on the set as if they were spying on us from the ceiling of a bedroom.

Amit Sharma, our director, took on the fragility of the language and the characters and found a balance that celebrated Jack's writing, respected the pain and emotional arc of the story whilst showcasing Graeae's ethos of inclusive and accessible theatre and the talent of D/deaf and disabled artists out there.

Being deaf has been at the core of who I am, my entire life. Graeae gave me the space and the freedom to explore and express my identity and abilities on my own terms - a safe space whilst working within the professional parameters of the theatre.



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Image: *The Solid Life of Sugar Water*, 2015 & 2016. Photo: Patrick Baldwin

## The Garden

By Alex Bulmer

**Presented by Graeae, British Council Brazil and Strange Fruit. Performed on the Olympic Boulevard**

Graeae were invited by the British Council to re-mount their outdoor spectacle *The Garden* in collaboration with Strange Fruit, for the Rio 2016 Cultural Olympiad.

Gravity-defying outdoor theatre, *The Garden* sees a troupe of nomadic story-keepers share their stories of grace, growing up and imagination, all performed on four-metre high sway poles, to a background score by Lewis Gibson.

Co-directed by Jenny Sealey and Grant Mouldey, the re-mounted production involved many elements coming together; the re-creation of the set by a Brazilian production team, a partnership with Australian circus company Strange Fruit who provided the iconic sway poles and the integration of four different languages into the existing script (English, British Sign Language, Brazilian and Libras).





## Amelia Cavallo

**Cast member, *The Garden***

My status as a blind performer has also afforded me some amazing experiences that are unique to the disability arts community. Four years ago, I was lucky enough to be one of the professional artists to perform on a sway pole in the Paralympic Opening Ceremony. I was then given the opportunity to take that skill to Rio as a performer in Graeae and Strange Fruit's beautiful outdoor show, *The Garden*.

*The Garden* is a well-established show for Graeae that has been performed multiple times. I knew it would be extremely challenging for a number of reasons. First and foremost, sway pole performing is physically challenging, requiring a very specific type of fitness and I had not been on one in four years. Luckily, I am still a fit and practicing aerialist, so the transition was not too bad.

The minute we arrived, we were welcomed seemingly by the entire city with open arms. The Brazilian team we had working on the show with us was AMAZING. I have never met a group of people more excited, keen and on the ball when it came to putting a show together in a short and very intense amount of time.

*The Garden* and so much of the work Graeae has done in the UK and internationally has solidified this company as a true ambassador of disability equality and access. On a personal level, Graeae has given me some of the most amazing and fulfilling jobs in my career, and has taught me so much about my skill and potential as an artist and a person.



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Images: *The Garden* 2016, photos: Andrea Testoni



Image:  
Audience members watching *The Garden* in Brazil

# The House of Bernarda Alba

**By Federico García Lorca, translated by Jo Clifford,  
directed by Jenny Sealey**

This was the first major co-production between the Royal Exchange Theatre and Graeae Theatre Company.

Renowned performer **Kathryn Hunter** played Bernarda in Lorca's final masterpiece - a bitter and darkly comic tragedy charting the tyranny, jealousy and desperate struggle for freedom between a mother and her five daughters. Jenny Sealey's acclaimed production featured an all-female cast of D/deaf and disabled artists, including Kellan Frankland, making her professional stage debut following her training on Graeae's 2015-16 **Ensemble** training.

The show incorporated British Sign Language, audio description and captioning in the Royal Exchange's unique in-the-round auditorium, marking the first time Graeae had worked in a space such as this.

★★★★ 'Director Jenny Sealey's seamless incorporation of British Sign Language, visual description and captioning...breathtaking theatre by the most economical means.' *The Guardian*

★★★★ 'Jenny Sealey directs with dexterity, interweaving all the demands of this production into something special. An extraordinary production.' *The Times*



## Chloë Clarke

### Cast member, *The House of Bernarda Alba*

For me, Graeae has always represented a kind of theatrical zenith - the highest point in both standard and reputation - a company I could only dream of working with. I distinctly remember telling my mum, in the most teenage of tones, 'yeah, RIGHT, Mum, like I'll EVER get to work with THEM!' I never expected, well over 10 years later, I'd be doing just that.

Having achieved the double-whammy dream of working with Graeae and the Royal Exchange Theatre - two incredible teams coming together - the pressure was definitely on to 'be brilliant!'. I desperately wanted to live up to the expectations of Jenny Sealey (Director), Nicola Miles-Wildin (Assistant Director) and everyone else in our company, but moreover to maintain Graeae's incredibly high standards for our audiences. It quickly became clear that this was a groundbreaking production for the Royal Exchange - their loyal audience base generally hadn't experienced an inclusive, accessible performance like this before - so it was even more important to showcase what we as disabled artists are capable of.

Being a disabled artist, I'd be loath to use the word 'inspirational' as it makes us all queasy, but I think it's fair to say the experience of working with Graeae is inspirational, in the sense that I aspire to uphold the quality, ethos and integrity of the company.

I had a fabulous, mind expanding (not in a drug-fuelled way!) time on *The House of Bernarda Alba* and I've developed hugely as a performer as a result. I can't thank the whole company enough - everyone's brilliant, passionate and totally dedicated, and I really hope to work with them again in future. I've never been prouder to be part of a production than this.





Image: *The House of Bernarda Alba* 2017, photo: Jonathan Keenan





## Cosmic Scallies

**By Jackie Hagan, directed by Amit Sharma**

**A Royal Exchange Theatre and  
Graeae Theatre Company co-production.**

Set on a council estate in the North West town of 'Skem', *Cosmic Scallies* is a razor sharp, witty and timely play about friendship, class and absence.

Jackie Hagan's play was the first commission from Graeae's new writing programme, **Write to Play**. Loosely based on Jackie's own experiences of growing up as a disabled woman in the 'forgotten town' of Skelmersdale, *Cosmic Scallies* was directed by Amit Sharma and performed by Rachel Denning and Reuben Johnson.

With audio description and creative captioning at all performances, *Cosmic Scallies* premiered at the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe to sell-out audiences, followed by an equally successful autumn run at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester.

**'Laced with a delightful combination of poetic flourishes  
and laugh-out-loud one-liners.'** *Disability Arts Online*

★★★★ **'Jackie Hagan has created a tender and funny portrait  
of her much maligned Lancashire home town.'** *North West End*

★★★★ **'Beautifully evoked...  
an assured debut'** *The Scotsman*



## Reuben Johnson

### Cast member, *Cosmic Scallies*

This year I got the opportunity to work with Graeae on *Cosmic Scallies*, a two-hander-play set in Skelmersdale. Jackie Hagan's play was fast paced, funny and heart-warming and I was really excited to be involved. It was a joy to play the troubled and loveable scallywag, Shaun.



The vibe at Graeae is always a lively and supportive one from the first day of rehearsals. Everybody looks after each other which creates a positive, working atmosphere. As a non-disabled actor it was insightful for me to learn more about the different access requirements for performers and audience members. I will take this knowledge with me throughout my theatre career and beyond.

I found that Graeae use the accessibility aspects of each show to enhance the performance, not to compromise it. For example, our Director Amit Sharma and the production team were very detailed in the way the play-text would come up in the captions. There would be different fonts used for each location in the play and the words would be displayed on different parts of the set at different times. This made for an exciting experience for deaf audience members but I also got feedback from hearing patrons that they really enjoyed this feature of the show. I got a chance to listen to some of the audio description and it was full of character and personality. It was clear that this was designed to heighten the experience for blind audience members rather than just provide a factual account of what was going on on-stage. I thought it really helped to paint a vivid and accurate picture of Skelmersdale and the story being told.

I've loved working with Graeae and always came to work with a smile on my face. It would be great to work with them again in the future.



Image: *Cosmic Scallies* 2017, photo: Jonathan Keenan

# Reasons to be Cheerful 2017 tour

**By Paul Sirett, directed by Jenny Sealey**

**A raucous musical featuring music by Ian Dury and the Blockheads.**

Possibly one of Graeae's best known shows, *Reasons to be Cheerful* returned in autumn 2017 in a brand new production, thanks to strategic touring funding from Arts Council England. This raucous punk musical, a gritty coming of age tale about two die-hard Ian Dury fans, features hits including *Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll*, *Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick*, *Sweet Gene Vincent* and *Spasticus Autisticus*.

As well as reuniting many of the original cast members from the 2010 and 2012 tours, we were delighted to welcome new actors and musicians to the show including Max Runham, Gerard McDermott and Joey Hickman (also providing new musical arrangements), Louis Schultz-Wiremu and Beth Hinton-Lever.

We were equally delighted to have a brand new protest song written especially for the show by Blockheads Chaz Jankel and Derek Hussey along with lead vocalist John Kelly entitled *If It Can't Be Right Then It Must Be Wrong*, performed in the encore of every performance and endorsed by Leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn.

With creative audio description, British Sign Language and captioning in the style of a 1970s slide-show, the 2017 tour played to over 13,000 people across the country, visiting Coventry, Derby, Ipswich, Southampton, Leeds, and Liverpool, ending with a two-week run at Theatre Royal Stratford East in London.

★★★★ 'It feels fresher than ever in this new touring version...

**Sealey's production is one of glorious anarchy.'** *The Stage*

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# Stephen Collins

**Cast member, *Reasons to be Cheerful***



I feel very blessed to have worked with Graeae on and off since the start of my acting career in 2010. They have guided and supported me in my development as an artist over the years, broadening my skills in sign language, spoken English, musical theatre, signed song, puppetry, facilitation and - perhaps most importantly of all - igniting the fire inside me to push myself even further creatively. All the amazing people I've worked with through Graeae have played a part in shaping me as an actor.

All the pieces I've done with Graeae are equally important, but the most significant (and my first) was *Reasons To Be Cheerful* in 2010 and 2012. I play Colin the anarchist, the rockiest character I have ever played and he has been the foundation and source of inspiration for all the work I have done since. The show has given us all so much as actors, but audiences are always so inspired by it too. The reactions from audiences have always been phenomenal, and the energy they give us is indescribable as they recall their punk days, connect with the younger generation and help spread the word that we're not just there to 'exist'. If I could, I would do this show forever.

Graeae creates shows and projects with big ensembles and involving communities that I have become accustomed to. *Reasons* being one and *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Iron Man* being the others. Each show has been so different in the way they tell the story in a creative accessible way. It hasn't always been an easy journey as you become aware of the limitations you have. For example, the sign songs in *Threepenny Opera* were a real challenge because of the complex music, while *Reasons* and *The Iron Man* were both physically demanding.

Sometimes I felt out of my depth and have doubted myself. But it does not mean I couldn't do it. It means that I adapt and learn. It's all thanks to Graeae. Graeae will always be safely tucked in my heart.





Image: *Reasons to be Cheerful* 2017, photo: Patrick Baldwin