

LEADING DISABLED ARTISTS & CULTURAL LEADERS SEND OPEN LETTER TO UK CULTURE MINISTERS DEMANDING SUPPORT FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

#WeShallNotBeRemoved

Over 100 leading disabled artists and cultural leaders have today sent an open letter to The Secretary of State for Culture Oliver Dowden MP and devolved UK Culture Ministers, demanding safeguards to protect the future of disability arts in the UK as a consequence of Covid19.

Signatories include high profile disabled creatives including actors Mat Fraser & Nabil Shaban, visual artists Tony Heaton & Ashok Mistry, percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie, poet Jamie Hale, broadcasters Samantha Renke & Mik Scarlet, film director Justin Edgar, performer Jess Thom, theatre directors Jenny Sealey, Amit Sharma, & Vici Wreford-Sinnott and Disability Champion for Arts & Culture, Andrew Miller.

The letter warns that the pandemic has **magnified inequalities** for disabled people working in the creative industries and that many are facing long term shielding, loss of income and invisibility in wider society.

Disabled cultural leaders are calling on the government to extend the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) beyond August, to prioritise involvement of disabled people in cultural policy, to ensure the renewal and recovery of the cultural sector is more inclusive and offers greater access and representation.

The open letter was organised by the new UK Disability Arts Alliance **#WeShallNotBeRemoved**. The alliance is an emergency response led by disabled people for disabled people working across the UK's creative industries in every capacity and across artforms.

Andrew Miller, UK Government Disability Champion for Arts & Culture said: *"The speed of recovery planning risks excluding many creative disabled people. So it is essential the UK Government ensures cultural renewal is planned inclusively with creative disabled people at its heart".*

Jenny Sealey MBE, CEO & Artistic Director of Graeae Theatre said: *"It is vital we work collectively to support each other through and after the storm of Covid19 and ensure that our disabled community is at the heart of evolving arts policy and practice".*

Robert Softley Gale, Artistic Director of Scotland's Birds of Paradise Theatre Company said: *"Covid19 threatens everything we've worked towards unless we ensure that our response is solid and places disabled people at the centre of all discussions about our future."*

Amit Sharma, Deputy Director of Birmingham Rep said: *"Deaf and disabled people have made a significant contribution across the arts locally, nationally and internationally. It's taken huge progress to just get here and it cannot be right that Birmingham Rep is in a tiny group of organisations that employs disabled people at senior level within our industry. If we're not part of the conversation then there's a real danger we go backwards. We can not become invisible again"*

Jo Verrent, Senior Producer of UK commissions programme Unlimited said: *"Isolated and increasingly ignored by many, disabled people MUST be at the centre of the cultural sector to come, one that is both physical and virtual, includes all and excludes no one"*

Charlene Salter, co-chair of Access All Areas Board of Trustees said: *“Disability arts is really important because that’s how we express ourselves and also being creative. We understand things better that way and we use this in our works and performances to get our voices heard. In this COV-19 situation being a person with a Learning Disability it’s more scary and confusing and frustrating. It’s really important that all of us - Learning Disability/disabled/autistic/Deaf - we need to be involved in the government. We are being left out in Conversations and we are part of the Community as well.”*

#WeShallNotBeRemoved is a forum to advocate, to campaign and support D/deaf, neurodiverse and disabled creative practitioners and organisations through and after Covid19. The aims of the alliance are:

- To ensure a sustainable future for disability and inclusive arts in the UK through and after the pandemic
- To amplify the voices of D/deaf, neurodiverse and disabled creative practitioners & disability arts organisations at a time of crisis for the arts and for disabled people

Membership of **#WeShallNotBeRemoved** is free, open to all individual D/deaf, neurodiverse and disabled creative practitioners and disability focused organisations operating in the UK’s creative industries. Within a month of forming the alliance has attracted over 350 members.

The open letter was also sent to Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs at The Scottish Government, Lord Dafydd Ellis-Thomas, Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport & Tourism at The Welsh Government, Deirdre Hargey, Northern Irish Minister for Communities and Jo Stevens, Shadow Secretary for Culture, Media & Sport.

The open letter is housed on Graeae Theatre’s website. The text of the letter and full list of **140 signatories** is included below:

Dear Secretary of State,

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

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

All this inclusive progress is threatened by Covid-19.

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

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

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

*Our visionary Disability Arts Movement used a phrase in the 1980s that greatly advanced the cause of the Social Model of Disability being adopted across the world. That phrase is as relevant now in the midst of this pandemic as it was then: **nothing about us without us**. In this sentiment we are in full solidarity with our Black and Asian theatre colleagues who wrote to you on 28 May and with the seismic actions being taken across the world through the Black Lives Matter movement.*

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

Signed,

Jenny Sealey MBE CEO/Artistic Director, Graeae Theatre
Andrew Miller, Disability Champion for Arts & Culture
Tony Heaton OBE, Chair, Shape Arts
David Hevey, CEO, Shape Arts
Ruth Fabby MBE, DL, Director of Disability Arts Cymru
Robert Softley Gale, Artistic Director, Birds of Paradise Theatre Company
Jodi-Alissa Bickerton, Creative Learning Director, Graeae Theatre
Jo Verrent, Senior Producer, Unlimited
Vici Wreford-Sinnott, Artistic Director, Little Cog / Disconsortia
Barry Farrimond MBE, CEO, Open Up Music and National Open Youth Orchestra
Carien Meijer, Chief Executive, Drake Music
Gareth Cutter, independent artist & Artist in Residence (Drake Music)
Melanie Sharpe, CEO, Stagertext
Julie McGowan, Trustee at The University of the Atypical, independent artist.
Stephen Bailey, Resident Assistant Director, Chichester Festival Theatre
Toki Allison, BFI FAN Access Officer, Inclusive Cinema - Film Hub Wales
Aisling Gallagher, freelance director, theatre practitioner, Councillor London Borough of Lewisham
Kelsie Acton, dancer/choreographer, Inclusive Practice Manager, Battersea Arts Centre
Becki Morris, Director of Disability Collaborative Network C.I.C.
Robert Sanderson, venue manager retired, arts management consultant occasional
Jonny Cotsen, Freelance Theatre Maker / Access Consultant & Facilitator
Chris Tally Evans, freelance artist
Trish Wheatley, CEO, Disability Arts Online
Stephanie Fuller, Director/CEO, Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft
Linda Rocco, Freelance Curator, Producer and Consultant
Andrew Roach, Talent Agent/MD, Andrew Roach Talent Ltd
Daryl Beeton, Daryl Beeton Productions
Jonathan Harper, Chief Executive, Paraorchestra
Michèle Taylor, Director for Change, Ramps on the Moon
Lloyd Coleman, Associate Music Director, Paraorchestra
Sophie Woolley, Freelance Writer & Performer
Simon Morris, General Manager, Blue Apple Theatre

Ellie Page, Writer, Designer & Consultant, Managing Partner Still Ill OK + Nice Time Arts
John R. Wilkinson, Freelance Theatre Director, Artistic Associate, York Theatre Royal
Caglar Kimyoncu, Artistic Director, filmpro
Dr Jessi Parrott, Performer, Poet and Academic
Steve Moffitt, CEO, A New Direction
Joanne Roughton-Arnold, Opera Singer & Company Director, formidAbility
Julian Gray, Freelance Illustrator
Mik Scarlet, Broadcaster, Musician, Actor & Inclusive Practice Consultant.
Mat Fraser, actor and writer, co-director of ONEOFUS
Paul Wilshaw, actor and producer, Assistant producer at Mind the Gap
Tim Wheeler, freelance theatre-maker, arts consultant and lecturer
Kyle McCall Wilson, Social Media Marketing Officer at EGO Performance Company
Charlotte Darbyshire, Artistic Director, Candoco Dance Company
Jo Royce, Executive Director, Candoco Dance Company
Becky Morris Knight, Freelance Comms & working with Drake Music
Donna Holford-Lovell, Director, NEoN Digital Arts (NEoN)
David Proud, Freelance Actor, Writer, Director
Samantha Tatlow, Talent Coordinator, thinkBIGGER! Ltd,
Justin Edgar, Film Director, Writer and Producer, 104 films
Sam Oldknow Film Studies Masters Student
Kim Tserkezie, Actor, Presenter, Producer, MD Scattered Pictures
Jamie Beddard, Co-Director Diverse City & Agent for Change New Wolsey
Philippa Cole, Actor
Kyla Harris, Actor, Writer and founder of The Other Screen
Ella Glendining, Filmmaker and Writer
Sho Shibata, Executive Producer, Stopgap Dance Company
Lucy Bennett, Artistic Director, Stopgap Dance Company
Jennifer Gilbert, Director Jennifer Lauren Gallery and freelance producer/curator
Amy Cunningham, Creative Director, Dark Horse Theatre
Jess Thom, Co-artistic Director, Touretteshero
Matthew Pountney, Co-artistic Director, Touretteshero
Bobby Baker, artist, Artistic Director, Daily Life Ltd.
Joe Stevenson, Freelance Writer and Musician
Hannah Quigley, freelance director/practitioner/arts manager
Eleanore Hall, artist, Project Manager, Club Soda Croydon
Flossie Waite, Communications & Engagement Producer, Oily Cart Theatre Company
Alison Garratt, Touring Producer, Oily Cart Theatre Company
Martin Wilson, Director, TIN Arts
Georgie Morrell, Comedian, Actor and Writer
Tom Wentworth, playwright, screenwriter
Midnight Memphis, BFI FAN Access Coordinator, Beacon Films Exhibition Office
Nick Llewellyn, Artistic Director, Access All Areas
Rachel Rogers, Producer, DaDaFest, Liverpool
Hana Pascal Keegan, Freelance Director / Writer / Dramaturg
Nabil Shaban, founder of Graeae Theatre, actor, writer, painter, novelist, poet, film-maker (Sirius Pictures), disability rights activist
Lorna O'Brien, Creative Manager, MarketPlace, Creative People And Places
Sarah Horner, Chief Executive, Hijinx Theatre
Laura Jones, Head of Talent Development, Stopgap Dance Company
Ellie Griffiths, Artistic Director, Oily Cart Theatre
Elise Davison, Artistic Director, Taking Flight Theatre Company

Stephanie Back, Actor, workshop facilitator and lead artist of Deaf & Fabulous Productions
 Laura Rees, Actor and current student of MA in Applied Theatre at Goldsmiths University
 Ashokkumar Mistry, Artist, Curator, Writer
 Deborah Dickinson, Senior Producer, Mind the Gap
 Heather Andrews, Sound Artist, Sound Designer and Recordist
 Casey Bottono, BA (Hons), MA Writer and Workshop Leader, The Writers' Block
 James Rose, Conductor
 Rona Topaz, Singer/Actress/Choir Leader
 Phoebe Kemp, Freelance Theatre Maker, Chair, Equity D/deaf and Disabled Member's Committee
 Liz Porter Freelance Arts & Heritage Access Consultant/performance storyteller
 Br. Andy TSSF - Singer/ Disabled Artist / Producer. Chair Disability Advisory Group. NHS.
 Beth Hinton-Lever, Actor.
 Lady Kitt, Artist and Drag King, co-founder of Nasty Women North East
 Nicola Cashin, General manager, EGO Performance Company
 Tim Nunn, Artist, Curator and Producer
 Simon Yuill, Artist
 Amy Trigg, Actor and Writer
 Jude Škulec, Stage Technician and Dresser
 Charlie Fitz, artist and writer
 Will Sadler, Development Director, Beacon Films
 Mike Layward Artistic Director DASH
 Katie J Redstar actor,writer,director
 Pauline Heath Actor and writer
 Kathryn Barnett, director of disability-led arts organisation Regeneration NE CIC
 Elaine Collins, Artist, Actor, Performer, Theatre Maker, MA student LIPA, Dadafest theatre makers
 Dan Edge, Actor, Model, Pro Wrestler, Equity D/deaf & Disabled Members Committee Vice Chair
 Tanya Raabe-Webber, Disabled Artist, Painter of People, Director of PortraitsUntold and ArtStudio01-
 Artists Collective
 Michelle Rolfe, Producer, BOP TheatreMorna McGeoch, Development Officer, BOP Theatre
 Caroline Cardus, Visual Artist, Creative Producer
 Samuel Brewer, Actor/Theatre Maker BA(hons) Acting Student Central School of Speech and Drama
 Sarah Archdeacon - Artistic Director, Corali
 Georgina Egan, Artistic Director, EGO Performance Company
 Corinne Robinson, Artistic Director, EGO Performance Company
 Kacey De Groot, Development Manager, EGO Performance Company
 Richard Nutter, Executive Director, DaDaFest
 Aidan Moesby. Artist/Curator
 Dr Vole, disabled singer/songwriter/poet
 Ben Pettitt-Wade, Artistic Director, Hijinx
 Alan Whitfield, National Visual Arts Officer, Disability Arts Cymru
 Sydney Thornbury, CEO/Artistic Director, The Art House, Wakefield
 Jen Garrick, Marketing & Communications Director, The Art House, Wakefield
 Ellie Tait, Critical Friend and Curator
 Samantha Renke broadcaster and disability rights campaigner
 Dame Evelyn Glennie - Musician, President of Help Musicians
 Beth House, Development Director/Joint CEO, Taking Flight Theatre Company
 Charles Hazlewood, Conductor, Founder and Artistic Director of Paraorchestra
 Stella Patrick, Marketing Consultant, Taking Flight Theatre Company and Freelance
 Louise Ralph, General Manager, Taking Flight Theatre Company
 Olga Macrinici, theatre maker
 Emily Garside, Chair Taking Flight Theatre Company.

Garrin Clarke, Stage Manager, Freelance
Katy Stephens, Actor/Manager, EGO Performance Company
Clare-Louise English, Co-Artistic Director, Hot Coals Theatre
Jo Sargeant, Co-Artistic Director, Hot Coals Theatre.
Jamie Hale, freelance writer and theatre practitioner, ensemble artist Graeae Theatre Company
Zara Rush, Producer for Corali & People Make It Work
Andrea Swainson - Engagement and Outreach Manager of Corali Dance Company
Jade French, Artist-Facilitator and Academic, University of Leeds
Amit Sharma, Deputy Artistic Director, Birmingham Rep
Jacqui Adeniji-Williams, Artist, Poet, Songwriter, Facilitator.
Rachel Gadsden, visual and performance artist

ENDS

For further information please contact Andrew Miller andrew.millerACSC@gmail.com @AndrewM_Arts

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