

Conference of Women
Theatre Directors & Administrators

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE BRITISH THEATRE

1982-1983

“What do you mean by Women Directors? There just aren’t any that are any good. We’re not made for that sort of thing. Organisation and administration is what we’re good at.”

Female response to survey

“Oh, just send me a woman director, I’ll employ her any time. I’ll also employ a blind, one-legged Chilean refugee.”

Male response to survey

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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Summary	6
Survey Findings	7
Appendix 1 Questionnaire	12
Appendix 2 Theatres contacted	13

INTRODUCTION

In 1980 a group of women theatre directors and administrators began to meet to discuss professional questions, with the awareness that the majority of top positions in the arts were held by men. Some preliminary research was undertaken by director Sue Pomeroy, which tended to confirm this awareness. From these meetings a voluntary organisation was formed, **the Conference of Women theatre Directors and Administrators**, which has had a membership fluctuating between forty and a hundred over the past four years, and has held workshops and public conferences which have drawn wide support. This support and the experience of members led to the conviction that a more thorough piece of research was necessary to determine the representation of women within the power structures of theatres nationally. This survey was therefore commissioned from an independent researcher and statistician and was conducted by telephone questionnaire in April/May 1983.

Theatre is a form of artistic expression which, although it plays to an audience of only 5% of the population, has a far wider cultural significance. The question of the control of theatres and their artistic programme, is therefore beyond a simple discussion of career opportunities for theatre practitioners. It also involves questions of a relationship with the society it serves. The three major objectives of the survey were therefore to investigate the presence of women in decision making positions in theatre; to identify the level of their involvement in the artistic processes; and to determine their share of public funding.

To fulfil these objectives the survey focuses on three main areas: Directors, Administrators and Playwrights. A theatre's or company's programme and policies will generally be decided by the Artistic Director, or Directors, often in consultation with the Administrator, who will also have decision making powers concerned with the management of the theatre or company. The institutions and organisations which make up the British Theatre are diverse, and in order to make useful generalisations the survey is concentrated on subsidised producing theatres. Firstly, because they are most easily compared; secondly, because they are most centrally involved in generating cultural initiatives; and thirdly, because they are publicly funded and therefore have a direct relationship with society. For these reasons, touring venues and commercial managements have been excluded.

Children's theatres and companies, and Theatre in Education companies have been excluded because their specialised functions required different consideration. Scotland was not included for financial reasons, however this does not necessarily invalidate the appropriateness of the survey's findings to Scotland.

The survey was conducted by telephone for speed and efficiency. Only two theatres refused to cooperate by phone. The period investigated was September 1982 to September 1983, this was specifically to avoid artificial inflation of figures produced by the **Women Live May 1982** festival. Spotlight Contacts was the source of theatre lists and the categories used. Every theatre or company listed was contacted, with an

excellent success rate. Alternative and Community Theatres were the most difficult to contact; being the most severely underfunded the administration is generally overstretched.

Theatres surveyed:

2 out of 2 (producing)	National
52 out of 54 (producing)	Repertory
24 out of 26 (producing)	Fringe
41 out of 61 (producing)	Alternative/Community

Summary

The findings of the survey confirm the subjective experience of many women in the theatre, and accord with the general position of women in other decision making areas of British society. This may surprise “lay” people, and some in the theatre, who would assume the theatre world to be more progressive. The survey demonstrates clearly that the more money and more prestige a theatre has, the fewer women will be employed as directors and administrators; the less likelihood that a play written by a woman will be commissioned or produced (excepting Agatha Christie); and the fewer women there will be on the Board. It is therefore clearly demonstrated that women play a meagre role in determining the “Agenda” in the most influential theatrical institutions. This is in painful contrast to their majority in higher education Arts courses, in audiences, and in the supporting roles in offices. The questions raised are, where all the potential female artists and workers disappear to, and what is it that prevents them entering and progressing in the professional theatre?

It is also shown that women do not feature well in Fringe theatre, who, given their radical history, might be expected to be more conscious of women as equals. It may be that the fact that many of them now have an established importance and are comparatively better funded, brings the conventional reasons into play. The greatest concentration of women occurs in the Alternative and Community categories of theatre. These are the least subsidised and least well-equipped, and offer the smallest stages, the smallest audiences, the least predictable and controllable venues, the smallest budgets, the least likelihood of classical work; in other words, the most difficult circumstances in which to produce art. (This is in no way to disparage the high standard achieved by these companies, and is a broad generalisation.)

These facts taken together confirm that women are the least subsidised artists and workers in the theatre. This raises serious questions about equality of opportunity and of artistic expression. This has in turn fundamental implications for the legitimate aspirations of women in theatre: for women directors to direct Shakespeare, and other classics, which are also their heritage; for women writers to write plays for main stages; for women actors to be offered parts which extend beyond playing a man’s mother, wife, mistress, sister or daughter; and for women administrators to run their departments as equals, not as super secretaries, in whichever structures they choose.

This survey is not exhaustive; for example the employment of actresses is not included, and some further research might prove valuable and interesting. However, the presentation of these figures clearly indicates that there is a case to be seriously examined. It may be that the measures taken by ACTT, and by Thames Television, in appointing an Equal Opportunities Officer (after an EOC funded survey revealed similar findings) are initiatives which theatre institutions may do well to follow.

Sue Parrish
1983

Notes on abbreviations used throughout survey:

A/C: Alternative and Community Theatres
F: Fringe Theatres
R: Repertory Theatres
N: RSC/National Theatres

SUMMARY

Number of Theatres and Productions during the survey period (September 1982-September 1983):

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Number of theatres surveyed	41	24	52	2	119
Productions during the period	154	170	620	80	1024

Total percentage female:

Artistic Directors: 12%

Associate Directors: 17%

Assistant Directors: 41%

Freelance Directors: 24%

Playwrights Produced: 11%

Plays written and directed by females: 44%

Administrators: 44%

Board Members: 26%

These figures are a rough guide. There is considerable variation between categories of theatre.

SURVEY FINDINGS IN DETAIL

ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Female	8	2	4	0	14
Male	31	22	47	3	103
Total	39	24	51	3	117
Percentage female	21%	8%	8%	0%	12%

RESIDENT ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Female	3	3	4	1	11
Male	1	3	21	29	54
Total	4	6	25	30	65
Percentage female	75%	50%	16%	3%	17%

N.B. The female associate director at the National Theatre is the Casting Director and does not direct productions.

ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Female	1	1	3	2	7
Male	0	1	8	1	10
Total	1	2	11	3	17
Percentage female	100%	50%	27%	67%	41%

The National Theatre does not employ Assistants. They employ Staff Directors whose function is slightly different from an Assistant. National Theatre Staff Directors: 4M, 2F.

FREELANCE DIRECTORS

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Female	15	17	31	7	70
Male	22	65	130	3	220
Total	37	82	161	11	290
Percentage Female	41%	21%	19%	73%	24%

The figure under Female N represents:

<i>National Theatre:</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>RSC Barbican Festival (low cost productions):</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>This includes 2 DSMs and 2 freelances who had recently completed a year as Assistants.</i>	
<i>RSC small scale tour:</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Total:</i>	<i>7</i>

FEMALE DIRECTORS EMPLOYED IN REPERTORY THEATRES WITH STUDIOS

	Number of females employed	Main House Productions	Studio Productions
Artistic Director	1	3	1
Associate Director	2	5	3
Assistant Director	3	2	3
Freelance Director	5	3	12
Total	11	13	19

19 out of 52 Reps have studios.

PLAYWRIGHTS OF PLAYS PERFORMED

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Female	23.5	39	42	4	108.5
Male	130.5	131	578	76	915.5
Total	154	170	620	80	1024
Percentage Female	15%	23%	7%	5%	11%

Under N:

3 plays written by females were low cost productions in RSC Barbican Festival.

Out of the 620 plays produced in the Reps 42 were written by females. Out of these 22 were written by Agatha Christie. 14 of the 42 were produced in Studios, none of these were by Agatha Christie. Therefore, 6 plays written by females other than Agatha Christie were produced on main stages.

DIRECTORS OF PLAYS WRITTEN BY FEMALES

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Female written and directed	16	20	9	3	48
Female written and male directed	7.5	19	33	1	60.5
Total	23.5	39	42	4	108.5
Percentage female written and directed	68%	51%	21%	75%	44%

The figures under N are again accounted for by the Barbican Festival

Total number of productions: 1024

Female written: 108.5 (female directed: 48; male directed: 60.5)

Male written: 915.5 (female directed: 130; male directed: 785.5)

Female directed: 178
 Male directed: 846

So

Females directed 130 of 915.5 male written: 14%
 Females directed 48 of 108.5 female written: 44%
 Females directed 178 of 1024 total: 17%

These figures show strong evidence of a relationship between the gender of playwright and director when the writer is female. Female directors directed three times as many plays written by females as by males. The evidence shows that there is a tendency to employ a female director where the female playwright is less known. When the playwright becomes well-known a male director is more likely to be employed.

ADMINISTRATORS

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Female	24	12	15	0	51
Male	16	11	37	2	66
Total	40	23	52	2	117
Percentage female	60%	52%	29%	0%	44%

THEATRE BOARDS

	A/C	F	R	N	Total
Female	112	68	143	13	336
Male	150	169	590	72	981
Total	262	237	733	85	1317
Percentage Female	43%	29%	20%	15%	26%

**COMBINED FIGURES FOR THE REPERTORY, RSC AND NATIONAL
THEATRES**

Total number of productions in Repertory Theatres: 620

Total number of productions by RSC and National Theatres: 80

	Females	Males	Total	Percentage Female
Artistic Director	4	50	54	7%
Associate Director	5	50	55	9%
Assistant Director	5	9	14	36%
Playwrights	46	654	700	7%
Directors of female written plays	12	34	46	26%
Administrators	15	39	54	28%
Board Members	156	662	818	19%

APPENDIX 2

INDEX OF THEATRES SURVEYED

National

The National Theatre
The Royal Shakespeare Company

Repertory

Haymarket Theatre Basingstoke
Lyric Theatre Belfast
Birmingham Repertory Theatre
Octagon Bolton
Little Theatre Bristol
Theatre Royal Bristol
Churchill Theatre Bromley
Civic Chelmsford
Everyman Cheltenham
Gateway Chester
Mercury Colchester
Belgrade Coventry
Playhouse Derby
Northcott Exeter
Redgrave Farnham
Leas Pavilion Folkestone
Great Eastern Stage Lincoln
Harrogate Theatre
Queens Hornchurch
Wolsey Theatre Ipswich
Century Keswick
Duke's Playhouse Lancaster
Thorndike Leatherhead
Playhouse Leeds
Haymarket Leicester
Phoenix Arts Leicester
Everyman Theatre Liverpool
Playhouse Liverpool
Library & Forum Manchester
Royal Exchange Manchester
Contact Theatre co. Manchester
Torth Theatre Milford Haven
Theatr Clwyd Mold
Watermill Newbury
Playhouse Newcastle upon Tyne
Royal Theatre & opera House Northampton
Playhouse Nottingham
Coliseum Oldham

Orchard Theatre Co. Devon
Playhouse Oxford
Theatre Royal Plymouth
Playhouse Salisbury
Stephen Joseph Scarborough
Crucible Sheffield
Nuffield Southampton
Palace Theatre Watford
Palace Theatre Westcliff
Theatre Royal Windsor
Swan Theatre Worcester
Connaught Theatre Worthing
Theatre Royal York

Outer London & Fringe Theatres

Almeida Theatre Islington
Ashcroft Theatre Croydon
Bear & Staff
Bush Theatre
Cockpit Theatre
Croydon Warehouse Theatre
Elephant Theatre
Gate at the Latchmere
Gate Theatre
Greenwich Theatre
Half Moon Theatre
Hampstead Theatre
ICA Theatre
King's Head Theatre Club
New End Theatre
Orange Tree Richmond
Oval House Theatre Club
Pentameters
Pindar of Wakefield
Royal Court Theatre & upstairs
Soho Poly Theatre Club
Theatre Royal Stratford
Theatro Technis
The Tramshed
Tricycle Theatre

Alternative & Community Theatres
(Touring companies for smaller venues)

ATC London
Bedside Manner Company
Bruvvers
Cherub

Combination
Common Stock Theatre Co Ltd
Entertainment Machine
Female Trouble
Foco Novo Ltd
Galactic Smallholdings Ltd
Hiss and Boo
Hull Truck Theatre Co Ltd
Incubus
Isosceles Comedy Company
Joint Stock Theatre Group
Live Theatre Co
Lumiere and Son Theatre Co Ltd
Major Road Theatre Co
Monstrous Regiment Ltd
Mrs Worthington's Daughters
Northern Black Light Theatre
Northumberland Theatre Co
Optic
Paines Plough Ltd
Pentabus
Phantom Captain
Pip Simmons Theatre Group Ltd
Pit Prop Theatre
Pocket Theatre
Proteus
Red Ladder Theatre Co Ltd
Re-Union
7.84 Theatre Company Ltd
Shared Experience Ltd
Skin & Bones
Snap People's Theatre Trust
Temba Theatre Co Ltd
Theatre Set-Up
Toot
Umbrella Theatre
Women's Theatre Group Ltd

N.B. The degree of public subsidy for some of these companies may be minimal.