

Women Centre Stage 2019 Report

0.64%

WOMEN'S
THEATRE
COMPANIES

99.36%

OTHER

21%

FEMALE
ARTISTIC
DIRECTOR

79%

MALE
ARTISTIC
DIRECTOR

Women Centre Stage 2019 Report

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PROLOGUE

The idea for the Hampstead Symposium arose in 2018 from a series of published articles and conversations among theatre colleagues about the lack of progress of women in theatre.

The zeitgeist was set by Times' Up and Me Too, and a comprehensive collective meeting became imperative. In December 2018, sparked by **Julia Pascal's** article in The Guardian, and led by **Maureen Beattie**, actor and president of Equity, we brought together a group of women playwrights, directors, actors and backstage professionals to discuss policy with **Sir Nicholas Serota**, Chair of the Arts Council. It was the first time in thirty-five years of campaigning and Glass Ceilings that a chair of Arts Council England had met and listened to us with attention.

This 'December' group became the core inspiration for the Symposium, with a wide professional experience including the Artistic Directors, **Brigid Larmour and Elizabeth Newman; Polly Kemp**, Founder of Equal Representation for Actresses, **ERA**; playwrights **Winsome Pinnock** and **Chloe Todd Fordham**, Literary Manager of Graeae; **Julia Pascal**, playwright, director and journalist; **Jemma Gross**, director and Education Officer of Stage Directors UK; and **Jennifer Tuckett**, playwright and academic.

At the centre of our concerns is the parity of women as artists in the theatre, and specifically for Sphinx, to promote the representation of women as protagonists with autonomy, authority, authenticity, taking centre stage; in short a profound transformation to the social, political and cultural landscape.

I was personally thrilled to present **Dame Rosemary Squire DBE**, a friend and colleague for thirty years to open the Symposium with her considerable West End and international theatre experience. The hugely impressive co-founder of ATG and Trafalgar Entertainments, Rosemary's address emphasised her commercially successful female friendly policies.

She introduced the keynote speaker, **Jude Kelly OBE**, again a longestablished colleague of both of us, whom I had finally tracked down by text in Ghana. It was of crucial importance to me that an international context should be set by Jude, sharing her worldwide WOW experience. This was humbling and inspirational.

An exhilarating and intense afternoon, the Symposium produced inspiring and compelling testimonies and talk, which culminated in a unanimous appeal for a Women's Theatre Network which we hope to implement.

We are thrilled that the legacy of these Sphinx talk-shops and festivals continues, among others, through the now established The Party Somewhere Else, and the forthcoming Women Taking The Stage at Milton Keynes.

SUE PARRISH
Artistic Director of Sphinx Theatre

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INTRODUCTION

This report is the second in a series of new research reports from Sphinx Theatre Company. The aim of these research reports is to provide new data on gender parity and equality in UK theatre in order to encourage critical awareness of current issues around gender parity and equality.

This report contains the introduction and key note speeches from the Women Centre Stage Symposium and outlines the key themes emerging from the Women Centre Stage Symposium: Are we at the Tipping Point? An afternoon event held at Hampstead Theatre on February 3rd 2019, the symposium brought together leading women across the theatre industry for a crucial and timely discussion on gender equality.

Hosted by founder, co-owner and joint chief executive of Trafalgar Entertainment Group Ltd and co-founder of the Ambassador Theatre Group **Rosemary Squire DBE**, the afternoon began with a Keynote Speech by **Jude Kelly OBE** speaking from her experience with the global success of the Women of the World festival.

Following the Keynote there were two panel discussions and a plenary.

The first panel was on Parity is the goal - Why are women so underrepresented across UK theatre? Where are the women's voices?

The first panel of the day included founder of the Women of the World WOW Foundation **Jude Kelly**, Artistic Director of Graeae theatre company **Jenny Sealey**, Head of Theatre at the Barbican Centre **Toni Racklin**, leading playwright **Winsome Pinnock**, and academic **Jennifer Tuckett**. The panel discussed the systematic barriers that women face in the industry, the challenges that those in power can face when trying to elevate women's voices, and the steps we can take to change this. The panel was chaired by **Maureen Beattie**, President of Equity.

The second panel was on Are we really asking for the Dorfman? - Writing for main stages, what's holding female writers back? Where are the women's stories?

The second panel was chaired by Sphinx Theatre Company's Artistic Director **Sue Parrish** who led leading playwrights **April de Angelis**, **Morgan Lloyd Malcolm**, **Timberlake Wertenbaker**, director **Rebecca Frecknall** and actor **Cherelle Skeete** in a discussion on their personal and professional experience in the industry and how they see things changing for the future.

The key themes contained in this report were identified via a process of coding. The report provides short quotations from the speakers to illustrate each key theme. Each key theme was referred to by more than three separate speakers in order to qualify as a key theme.

Key themes in terms of challenges facing women in UK theatre identified were:

- Being looked at negatively as a woman
- Permission
- Silencing
- Imposter Syndrome
- Lack of progress

Key themes in terms of potential strategies for overcoming these challenges were:

- Working together
- Champions
- The work women see
- Not listening to those who try to hold you back
- Access and diversity

The aim of these reports is to encourage and support awareness of gender parity and gender equality in UK theatre.

Women Centre Stage Symposium was sponsored by Nick Hern Books and supported by Arts Council England and Hampstead Theatre. The Stage was the media partner.

Project partners for the Women Centre Stage Symposium included Stage Directors UK, Equity, ERA 50:50, University Women in the Arts and The Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

This research project was commissioned by Sphinx Theatre Company and the researcher and author of these reports is **Jennifer Tuckett**. Jennifer is a researcher, writer, producer, consultant and academic, currently based at the University of Cambridge.

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SYMPOSIUM INTRODUCTION BY ROSEMARY SQUIRE

Welcome everyone. My name is Rosemary Squire, Co-Founder of ATG, now the global leader in commercial theatre and the largest employer in UK Theatre. Also of Trafalgar Entertainment, the leader in live broadcast from stage to screen through our Trafalgar Releasing and in performance education for young people through our Stagecoach Theatre Arts. Also proud Patron of Sphinx Theatre Company, and thank you Sue and Sphinx for making today happen.

This year I enter my 40th year of working in professional theatre. I came back from Graduate School in the US knowing 2 things: that I wanted to make my career in live theatre and didn't want to become an academic. I was a linguist, and a feminist, my dissertation was on Catalan Women writers, but crucially I had a few skills because I'd worked in theatre right through Sixth form and Uni. **Sue Birtwhistle** and **Richard Eyre**, who I'd met through Nottingham Playhouse Theatre in Education were inspirational and championed me. I embarked on a double life in London, earning a living in commercial theatre - operations, finance, business affairs as well as production, bag carrying for the last of a distinguished family of theatre entrepreneurs who turned out to be a sympathetic boss who gave me a lot of rope. I learnt a lot. Alongside I joined the burgeoning group of talented women working tirelessly to address the then very apparent inequalities and lack of diversity of any kind that prevailed in theatre and every other walk of life. With Sue and others I founded The Women's Playhouse Trust. We produced work of scale by women in mainstream venues - The Lucky Chance by **Aphra Behn**, Spell Number 7 by **Ntozake Shange** and **Louise Page's** Beauty and the Beast, publicly funded in part but also given my double life in commercial theatre with private investors and some in commercial venues.

My double life hit the buffers when the company I worked for was sold and whilst on maternity leave with my second child I was made redundant. Another job opened in commercial theatre as General Manager of a start-up theatre and film production business and I made the choice to move in that direction. But my roots stayed strong. I am perhaps proudest that whilst ATG became such a huge company, it was actually a good place to work. I was a mother and need more flexible working arrangements and never forget if you are the boss you can set the agenda (which is on the most fundamental level why we need more diverse leaders) so we had job sharing, home-working, flexible working hours and generous maternity pay long before other companies. We also had equal numbers of women in senior positions, **Sonia Friedman** being the most well-known. I championed and mentored her for 17 years, but there were and are many, many more brilliant women who came from or are still at ATG from **Helen Enright** to **Karin Gartzke** to **Julia Potts** to **Diane Benjamin**. I was proud that in the pay statistics large companies are required to publish that ATG came out best on the gender pay gap. Yes, it is perfectly possible to employ lots of women and be commercially successful. In my view diverse workforce helps a business grow, and makes it resilient, creative and fresh. Who wants same-old, same-old all the time? (CONTINUED ON P.09)

So yes, the landscape has changed enormously since I first set out almost 40 years ago, it's been way too slow and continues to be too slow, but as the bold title for today's symposium says 'Are We at the Tipping Point?'

I am delighted to welcome you all to take part in what promises to be an intense afternoon of discussion. This is a really exciting and crammed event, with some great speakers, outlined on the programme sheet, with opportunities for Q&A's at the end of each panel, and a plenary at the end of the afternoon. We have a brilliant line up of theatre practitioners who will be sharing their experience and expertise with you in this beautiful theatre. There will be refreshments at the break in the foyer, and a wonderful bookstall.

We would like to express our warmest thanks to Arts Council England and to Nick Hern Books for their generous support for the Women Centre Stage project, and especially this amazing event! We also thank Hampstead Theatre for their generosity in

hosting Women Centre Stage for the second year, and all our partners, Equity, the Writers' Guild, Stage Directors UK, ERA 50/50, University Women in the Arts, and The Stage, who have long championed women's progress.

And now our Keynote speaker is no stranger to any of us, through her many award-winning productions and her stunning reinvention of the South Bank. I have known her since our membership of the Conference of Women Theatre Directors in the 80's, a very significant association in the CV's of many women working in the arts today. Not least of her many achievements is the Women of World Festival which she now leads world-wide. **Jude Kelly** is here to tell us about her global success of Women of the World. **Jude Kelly.**

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KEYNOTE SPEECH BY JUDE KELLY OBE

Thank you, Rosemary, and it's true we go back a very long time. I'm going to look out into the audience for a minute and see how many of you go back a long time. I hope we're a really mixed group of very young practitioners and elders.

I hope so, because when Rosemary and I first met I was 22, and I was the Artistic Director of Solent People's Theatre which was a community based theatre in Hampshire, and I sat listening to women who were older than me and realised that I wasn't starting with the baton. I was, with any luck, receiving a baton at some stage and that this was going to be a long, long marathon to get the world, and ourselves individually, to believe in the imagination of women and to believe that the imagination of women is central to defining the world as a place of genuine equity.

"I'm not a religious person, but I want the faith to believe in the world being more good than bad, I want the faith to believe with stamina and determination and forensic application to what equality looks like, that we can move forward."

I want to start a bit further back by saying that one of the things that's happened to me since I set out with this festival idea, WOW, Women of the World, is I have travelled to many spaces, and met many remarkable girls and women, and as a creative woman, having fought all my life to give me the right to my own imagination. I think you probably all know what that feels like - have I got the right to my own imagination, do I believe in myself enough? What makes me feel I have the right to believe in myself to the amount that I want to. It wasn't really until I started talking to indigenous women, particularly when we did the WOW in Katherine, which we've done for four years now, in the Northwest Territory, that this idea of the collective imagination began to take some hold on me, and I began to understand something, or at least try to understand something, about what it can be like to have a collective imagination for power of the right kind. For goodness of the right kind.

I'm not a religious person, but I want the faith to believe in the world being more good than bad, I want

the faith to believe with stamina and determination and forensic application to what equality looks like, that we can move forward. When I was with the aboriginal women, doing WOW in Katherine, gradually I understood when they said, "let's just stand here and think about ancestors, past and present," and I don't think I knew what that meant at all, and I probably still only have a hazy understanding, but there is something remarkable about trying to connect with the idea of women's struggle through history. Because every so often it pops up, an amazing woman who's done this, and an amazing woman who's done that, but also just the communities of women all through our lives getting us to this place. Not just the women in our own sector, in the arts, but women in every walk of life. Holding on to some idea that there was something powerful about being a woman that would matter and that finally would matter centrally to the world's imagination.

My grandmother left school when she was 12 and she had 14 children, my mother left school when she was 15 and she had 4 children, I'm one of them, obviously, and they were 4 daughters. My father who was a huge influence on me, somehow in my mind he was the person I gave the credit to for my confidence, my aspiration, my imagination. I still want to credit him, he's just died, and he was a marvelous man, but interestingly I never credited my grandmother or really my mother, they were just the women who did the stuff. And as this idea of ancestors past and present has landed in me more and more, I really wanted to make sure that I don't suffer from internal misogyny, internal sexism; an internalised idea that of course women were important but what really matters is male legitimacy.

The reason I started the WOW, Women of the World Festivals, is because I wanted to come out as a woman. Now, as a cis-gendered white woman from Liverpool, I've always been a woman and I've never had anybody telling me other. But even though, as Rosemary has just said, I have been part of committing to getting

younger directors into places of influence, speaking on behalf of feminism, making sure that people think about this all the time, my imagination was largely focused on something I still believe in profoundly, which is that everybody, everybody, has the right to an equal place in the world, and their imagination must be allowed to determine their future, without anybody putting limitations on it. So most of my work, for those of you who know anything about me, has been in creating places, BAC, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Southbank Centre, Metal etc., that spoke of that human right for endeavor to be possible whoever you are, and for that to be something where the community of artists learn from the stories around us rather than pose the stories from above.

When I'd been at Southbank Centre, maybe for 4 years, and realised how much power I had, and I use that word deliberately, I had enormous power to commission, to give opportunities, to give jobs, and there are many women in this forum, and men too, who have power, you all have some level of agency. Even if you can't pay your gas bill, I promise you, you have more agency than many, many other people. When I realised I had that all that agency, and that although I was speaking about the importance of women, the reality of what I was able to put on our stages, on our platforms, on our concert halls, in the cinema etc., the reality was I was preserving, supporting and promoting the canon of work that reinforced the idea that women were not protagonists, and that women were a decorative extra. Of course I was horrified to think that that what I was doing, but by not doing anything else the inevitability was that. And so a place for everyone, a place of diversity, inclusion, all those words we use, still was a place that relegated people to their current place in the league of imagination.

So I felt as if I would be in a place of great fear if I was too cowardly to come out as a woman differently. I had a fear in starting the WOW, Women in the World Festival, because bizarre as this may seem, when you say "I'm going to support women", well this was 10 years ago, so I think it's slightly different now but bear with me, people would say, "Well of course you would, you're a woman" as if that was a criticism. You know what that's like, and the legacy and the burden of being any kind of "other", where your main chance of being legitimised is to not be "other", is to pass as something that is central. So not trying to be a man, but passing as a man, in the sense that you can do everything that a man can do, and maybe in the way that a man can do it, whatever that looks like. But all of this idea of not speaking about what you are in order to make sure that people didn't think you had an agenda. Or speaking about it enough, but in such

a convivial way that nobody felt that there was any danger, nobody felt there was any real scrutiny, nobody felt there was absolute jeopardy.

I mean, one gets very practiced at this, and it's very helpful if you want to have a good life, an easy life, and a loving life. After all we live all the time inside patriarchy, it's extremely difficult if you want to be in a happy relationship with a man, be it a brother, a father, a cousin, a nephew, a partner, whatever it is you can't keep banging on all the time about patriarchy, especially since they personally didn't invent it. I had to say at a certain point as a woman artist, that if I carried on feeling as if my best review was for a Chekov, then what was I actually saying about everything to do with where I was getting my personal legitimacy from? Being able to say I could direct absolute classics and get the right reviews... anyway you know what I'm talking about. I won't go on about this.

I really had to come to terms with the fact that I was frightened to start the WOW, Women of the World Festival, I was more frightened not to. I had seen so many women be so courageous, and I never had to be that courageous about my sex, about my gender. I had never had to be that courageous. I had some levels of opposition and some levels of hostility etc., but when you have power that is the moment that you can step out and say I stand for many, many other voices who don't have it, until they replace me. At least I'll stand here until this space is made possible for others. It wasn't as difficult as I thought it was. I have to say having had so much fear about it, for those of you who have stepped into space of belief, thinking "should I do this? Can I do this?" actually it's the fear beforehand. Like more or less all our decisions, it's the fear beforehand. The doing it actually feels a lot easier. This was before Malala was shot, before Boko Haram, before the Deli rape, before SayHerName, before Black Lives Matter, before any of the things that have produced this extraordinary, and I would say collective, understanding that inequality is deeply harmful and could be changed. I wanted to not only support women, but also step out of the artistic bubble, not because I don't love the arts, believe in the arts, not because this isn't my tribe, but because I recognise that self-preservation, which is what a lot of artists are involved in, also means that you have to batten down the hatches, or you think you do, and I felt as if we needed to look out at women in law, women in health, women in community contexts, all stories of women. Because we are storytellers, and I felt as if it was important for a while as an artist, to...not relinquish the world of fictional story, but to certainly step into the place of real story, beyond my own circle and knowledge.

As a white woman, as a white woman from the global north, I also had to get to grips with where that placed me in terms of perceived power, in terms of inevitable bias, my own inevitable bias. I don't believe it is possible to grow up in a society that is sexist, without inheriting it, I don't believe it is possible to grow up in a society that is racist without inheriting it, I don't believe it is possible to grow up in a society that is homophobic without inheriting it, disablist etc. I do believe that, and speaking as a woman who has come from a working class heritage, but has now transferred into a middle class space, I also know about how I can be aware of which bit of passing I want to do. So I am still in a space, as I'm sure that you all are, of trying to understand how do I deal with the things inside me that I have been groomed to believe. So groomed to believe them that I don't really know that they are there. Only with the help of others who have direct experience of areas of exclusion that I don't have, can I understand it at all, and therefore be less of a problem and more of an ally. Even the word ally is a problem. When people talk about male allies, I sometimes think - I'd rather you were an accomplice, because then if I get caught, you'll be up as well along with me. I think we have to have skin in each other's game.

So I started WOW because I had this huge platform at the Southbank centre, and my mantra really was: if you are a woman, you identify as a woman, or you know a woman, it will be for you. So as you can see it was an invitation to boys and men, it was an invitation not to define what woman is, it was an invitation to say it's a festival, which means that we'll be celebrating. There's plenty of opportunity for pain inside celebration, but let's commemorate, let's speak of our ancestry, let's speak of our future and let's imagine different ways of doing things. I don't want this to be an advert for the festival, as it were, but simply to explain what they've been doing for the last...well it will be 10 years next year, since I started the WOW festivals. They are now in 20 countries, we've done 65 of them so far, in many different places.

Each WOW festival takes place with women coming together, deciding they want a WOW, and the first step to do a WOW is that there has to be a conversation about whether those women know enough other women not like them to have a legitimate space that can even say "This is for women". So it can't begin from: "Well as long as they all look like me, and agree with me, then let's get going", that's not what a WOW festival can be. In the doing of the WOW festivals I am constantly re-realising, as an artist, that there are people who put themselves in genuine jeopardy, and then there's many of us in the room who may not have been in jeopardy, and who therefore, as storytellers, have the responsibility to keep those stories alive for real.

Sana Mir, who is the first captain of the Pakistani Women's Cricket team, if you can imagine what that is like, to take on that role, in terms of confidence, the ability to keep her team, to train her team. Of course, like all women's sports, utterly under-resourced, but also under constant death threats, having to be supported by the military. In fact she became a cricketer because she was the daughter of an army captain, and therefore could practice under military protection as a 5, 6, 7 or 8 year old. The first Indian woman surfer, whose parents said to her: "Obviously we're proud of you, but we would like you not do to it anymore. Not because we don't think you should surf, but because your skin is going to become darker, and therefore people won't understand what level of society you belong in and you will be less able to get married!" **Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala** who was the first Sri Lankan to climb Everest - not the first woman to climb Everest, the first Sri Lankan to climb Everest - who, because her partner was male, but whose oxygen ran out for a variety of reasons just as they got to the last bit, she summited, and he didn't. She has not only spent her life now getting plaudits for being Sri Lankan, but then having to protect the threats against him, and the humiliation against him, because a woman climbed it and he didn't.

So the negotiation of so many of these women that one is meeting, and of course these are celebrities, if you see what I mean, there are many, many unsung heroes, all doing very extraordinary things, and dealing with cultural contexts that ask of them something which is so difficult for the imagination. They have to believe in their own right to be in the place that they have found themselves, and yet also have the empathetic understanding, the empathetic imagination, that allows them to still look after the culture of their parents, or the army, or the society in general, in order for them not to become outcasts. It is a very strenuous activity, leading as a woman into places of unknown, and then making sure that you don't isolate yourself, and that other people are not made more hostile towards you as a result.

So this act of continual empathetic imagination is a thing I witness most when I look at these festivals happening all over the world, and I'm trying to learn as a theatre maker, as an artist, what is the most useful thing I can do? One of the most useful things I can do, is recognise as we all do, is that there is nothing more important than the power of story. Nothing more important. There are thousands of conferences, millions of symposiums, and all of these things about creating legal legitimacy, or changes in policy making etc. They are absolutely crucial to society moving forward, but we all know that in the end it doesn't matter how many laws you pass about domestic

violence, that is not what changes people's behaviour. What changes behaviour are the stories we tell to each other that suddenly change our heart, and the stories societies tell to each other that produces shame of the right kind and not the wrong kind.

So in the 10 years, nearly, that WOW has been going, I came to realise, a bit like Rosemary here, some wonderful play - Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time - that's a play transferring to different places that has real purpose, and you know it, and its important and let's keep it going. So I realised that WOW was relevant because people could make it relevant to them and their 19 circumstances. Whether that was in WOW Rio, which we did in November just after the election when it was really needed, and 98,000 women came to that; or the next WOW in Katherine where the indigenous aboriginal women are still in dialogue with the white settlers in Australia, trying to explain where they overlap in terms of understandings, and where they have difference, and what that's about.

So I stepped out of the role at Southbank Centre after 12 wonderful years, because I couldn't do both jobs any longer. One was so big, and it seemed an important and relevant time for us all to carry on this idea that placing women's stories at the centre of everything is really critical. I just want to examine this for a second because we did this book a few years ago called 50 Shades of Feminism. I wrote my chapter on women's football, and this was because I'd met somebody recently at that time, in a new flush of romantic involvement (still going by the way, it's fine) and he took me to Gillingham Football Club. You know what it's like when you've just met somebody, you're all gung-ho, like "Oh, of course!" you know, "Whatever!"; and at the "interval" as I called it, I went to get some coffee, and actually it was Bovril, which was great, and the women who were serving me were giving out leaflets about Gillingham Women's Football club. So I said, "who are they?" and they said "Oh that's us". Now I'd just witnessed the opening of the Gillingham match with loads of little boys coming on as junior footballers, and then 12 year old girls doing absolutely energetically enthusiastic twirling and jumping in the air, and the whole majorette type of thing, with not much clothes on in the freezing cold. I was very struck by this segregation immediately between the boys and the girls before the match, and at the half-time the women behind the counter said they were the Gillingham ladies' team. They didn't practice on this field, because they weren't allowed to, they had to go down to Chatham docks to practice, even though they all lived in Gillingham. This lead me to investigate women's football in general, which I'm sure some of you know the history, but the biggest game of

women's football was in 1925, the biggest game of any football match at the time was Dick Kerr Ladies team in St. Helens, and then straight after that the football association banned women's football and said it wasn't appropriate for women to play football. It was banned for women to 20 play football professionally until 1979. So when I think about **Sana Mir** playing cricket, or when I think about the women now playing rugby and football, with that massive gap, that is the equivalent of closing the theatres during the Puritans' time, and saying nothing will happen. Women have got to rebuild their confidence, their skill, their belief against a background of ridicule, humiliation and "Who do you think you are?".

We have to support anything that women are doing, in my opinion. Anything that women are doing for good, because the story is so broken, the story is so uneven, the story is so coloured by intersectional cruelty, and therefore in creating a celebratory space, which I hope WOW is, it's really to say that all of these stories have to be understood by us. We are not in a situation where one thing isn't the consequence of another. Finally, we are talking about what a power structure has done to us, ie. Patriarchy, and how together as men and women, and together as people who are interested in redefining gender completely, how we might have the imagination, the collective imagination, to be able to believe that it will be different. Not just to make our bit a bit better, but to say everything will be different in the future. That is what I'm trying to do, I'm trying to not just do the festivals, that's what I'm currently up to, but I'm trying to challenge myself - do I have enough imagination to believe that this different world that I've ever seen, never heard discussed properly, it's never been written about, never seen it in fiction, do I believe it exists? I do. But every day you have to practice what that belief could look like. We did get rid of the Divine Right of Kings, it is possible to think that Patriarchy will come to an end.

Thank you.

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KEY THEMES FROM THE SYMPOSIUM IN TERMS OF CHALLENGES

The following key themes have been identified as emerging from the Women Centre Stage symposium panel events and speeches in terms of challenges facing women working in theatre in the UK

5.1

Being looked at negatively as a woman

Being looked at in a negative light as a woman came up as a recurrent issue for many of the speakers during the panel events and speeches.

For example, director **Rebecca Frecknall** spoke of being looked at as young, saying "He said "God, you look like you've just finished your A Levels".

Similarly, **Jude Kelly** said: "I had fear in starting the WOW Women of the World Festival because as bizarre as this may seem when you say "I'm going to support women"... people would say "well, of course you would, you're a woman". As if that was a criticism".

Rosemary Squire spoke of how, whilst on maternity leave with her second child, she was made redundant.

Jude Kelly also said: "Interestingly I never credited my grandmother or really my mother (growing up). They were just the women who did the stuff. And.... I really wanted to make sure that I don't suffer... an internalised idea that of course women are important but what really matters is male legitimacy... The reason I started the WOW, Women of the World, Festivals is because I wanted to come out as a woman."

5.2

Permission

Many of the speakers spoke about their experiences, positive and negative, in terms of permission.

Playwright **Timberlake Wertenbaker** spoke of how "I felt all my life that I was writing by permission, that the men were allowing me to write. Then at a certain time I felt that permission was withheld".

Playwright **April de Angelis** spoke of "the fantastic boldness it gives you to be in a women's theatre company. We were each other's gauge.... It was so exciting to have that permission".

Jude Kelly said: "as a creative woman I have fought all my life to give me the right to my own imagination... Do I believe in myself enough? What makes me feel I have the right to believe in myself to the amount I want to?... I want the faith to believe that, with stamina and determination and forensic application to what equality looks like, we can move forward".

5.3

Silencing

Many speakers spoke of the issue of the silencing of women, for example by those who commission work or decide what work is produced.

Timberlake Wertenbaker spoke of how, over the course of a writing career, the industry, who are often male managers, creates, in terms of female

playwrights, *"women being silent... then you feel permission to speak... then the possibility of re-silencing"*.

Actor **Cherrelle Skeete** spoke about taking the lead on your own projects rather than waiting for permission as a way of overcoming silencing.

5.4

Imposter Syndrome and Anxiety

Many of the speakers spoke of imposter syndrome and anxiety, and how this is experienced at every stage of career.

Playwright **Morgan Lloyd Malcolm** and an audience member spoke about imposter syndrome, with Morgan speaking of how, even with the success of her play *"Emilia"* in the West End, she still suffered from imposter syndrome.

Jude Kelly said: *"I was frightened to start the Women of the World Festival...Because I'd seen so many women be so courageous and I'd never had to be that courageous about my sex, about my gender."*

Playwright **Winsome Pinnock** spoke of how *"when I first started writing, I didn't doubt that I would eventually get a play on. This is the confidence of youth....And it did happen. But I'm afraid that confidence didn't quite sustain itself. Because what I didn't realise at the time... was I wasn't represented on those stages."*

5.5

Lack of progress

Several of the speakers spoke of the sense of the same conversations happening over the years in terms of gender equality, but little change being made.

President of **Equity Maureen Beattie** spoke of how *"For the first time in my career (because for 45 years I've heard this argument going on, it's so tiring) I really genuinely believe we are now at a point where we are not going to go away, we are not going to disappear into the background and lick our wounds and come out fighting in another X number of years' time.*

We will bandage our wounds as we keep marching." Head of Theatre at the *Barbican Centre Toni Racklin* said: *"I find it a bit confusing to be sitting here so many years later and we're having the same conversation.... I think we have come a long way but we haven't come far enough".*

Jude Kelly said: *"We did get rid of the Divine Right of Kings. It is possible to think that Patriarchy will come to an end".*

6

KEY THEMES IN TERMS OF SOLUTIONS

The following key themes were identified in terms of potential solutions to challenges experienced by women in theatre

6.1

Working together

The importance of women working together was a recurrent theme from the speakers throughout the symposium. Several examples of this are:

Timberlake Wertenbaker spoke of *"the importance of women understanding each other and their own unconscious prejudices"*.

Cherelle Skeete spoke of *"strength in collaborating and working together and making space for these stories to be told"*.

Jude Kelly said: *"Even the word ally is a problem. When people talk about male allies I sometimes think, "I'd rather you were an accomplice. Because then, if I get caught, you'll be up as well, along with me". I think we have to have skin in each other's game"*.

April de Angelis said: *"I started off and I worked for a women's theatre company... and from there I ended up getting a commission with Sphinx, which is another women's theatre company. I think the point is we're talking about permission and silence and there's the fantastic boldness it gives you, it certainly gave me, to be in a group of women where we were writing plays and making work just for women and we were each other's gauge of what was significant, what should be spoken about, and there was nothing which should be pushed under the table and considered not worthy"*.

6.2

The types of work women do/see being important - seeing/creating women on stage

The importance of seeing work by women on stage was a recurrent theme which was highlighted by the majority of speakers.

Morgan Lloyd Malcolm spoke of how "as a woman, I wanted to be a playwright, but I had to look hard for examples of women who were doing it".

Jude Kelly spoke of how "I had to say at a certain point as a woman artist that if I carried on feeling as if my best review was for a Chekhov then what was I actually saying about everything to do with where I was getting my personal legitimacy from".

Winsome Pinnock spoke of "*St Joan, Taming of the Shrew and The Sea* by Edward Bond... All plays by men but with amazing female characters...

Those three were my first experiences of theatre. So I thought theatre was a place where you could speak, you told these stories, but it was about change.

So I thought there was a place there for me and it wasn't until later that I realized I wasn't actually represented".

Artistic Director of Graeae theatre company **Jenny Sealey** said: "Last year **Rufus Norris** asked me if I would be one of the directors at the National Theatre... for 100 years of the vote for women, and I wrote back and said 'well, I hope you can find me a play that's about deaf and disabled women in that time of history.' There wasn't anything. There are no plays that have been written, and time and time and time again deaf and disabled people are written out of history... We were lucky.... **Dr Susan Croft** found us a handful of women from that time and the only reason they were referenced was because they were arrested. It was total joy to be in the Dorfman Theatre with 11 deaf and disabled women making history because I don't think they've had that many deaf and disabled women on that stage ever. But we were only on for one night."

6.3

Champions

Many of the speakers spoke about the importance of champions and mentors.

Winsome Pinnock said: *"When I joined the Royal Court young writers' group again, I thought there's a place for me here, there's a space for me here, people are listening to my work, they want to hear it etc. I was so lucky to be taken up by Jules Wright and the Women's Playhouse Trust because actually when I think about it now if I hadn't been, I don't think I don't think I'd be sitting here"*.

Morgan Lloyd Malcolm spoke of the importance of being believed in for her play Emilia.

Toni Racklin said: *"Thelma Holt became Artistic Director of the Roundhouse and I never did any more shorthand typing. She gave me incredible opportunities.... Then I went to work for the Women's Playhouse Trust and the same thing happened again. Rosemary, Sue and the late Jules Wright all pushed me and pushed me because they must have believed in me. And I didn't want to let them down, so I learnt on the job and through their enormous generosity."*

6.4

Not listening to those who try to hold you back

Not listening to those who try to hold you back was also a recurrent theme.

Timberlake Wertenbaker stated *"I want to talk about three words. Permission. Silencing. Invisibility"*.

Rosemary Squire said: *"I'm perhaps proudest that whilst ATG became a huge company it was actually a good place to work"*.

Jude Kelly spoke of the importance of not giving up and of *"women in every walk of life holding on to some idea that there was something powerful about being a woman that would matter and finally would matter centrally."*

6.5

Access and diversity

The importance of access and diversity was a recurrent theme.

Cherelle Skeete spoke about having to navigate different situations of racism and sexism.

Jenny Sealey spoke of how *"so much has been achieved but, fuck me, it's going down the Swanee again. Because when I think about other disabled women, artistic directors, there's only a handful, maybe 10 that I know of. And we in our jobs are stifled by Access to Work putting caps on what we are allowed to do. I am so lucky that my interpreters today have been paid for by Sphinx because my Access to Work has been frozen"*.

Rosemary Squire said: *"At ATG we had job sharing, home working, flexible working hours, generous maternity pay long before other companies.... I was proud that in the pay statistics... ATG came out best on the gender pay gap. Yes, it's perfectly possible to employ lots of women and be commercially successful"*.

Winsome Pinnock said: *"This is what we need....*

The people who believe in this, who truly believe in this change. The world is going to change and what I'd like to say is you'd better be preparing for it. All of us in this room, because we are going to be the people running those theatres, we are going to be the gatekeepers so we've got to do the work now that makes us ready for that role. Regimes change and we need people who don't just have a kind of an interest in equality, we need to have people running these spaces who live and breathe this."

Sue Parrish, Artistic Director of Sphinx Theatre Company, said: *"we need to be on the main stages, not the fringes, not just a Sunday afternoon when a theatre is dark. That's the key"*.

7

CONCLUSION

This report is the second report in a new series of research reports being completed by Sphinx Theatre Company.

Key themes identified via a process of coding highlighted the following challenges facing women in UK theatre:

- Being looked at negatively as a woman
- Permission
- Silencing
- Imposter Syndrome
- Lack of progress

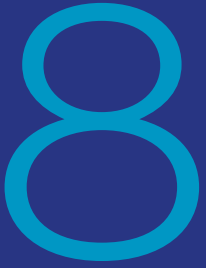
Key themes in terms of potential strategies for overcoming these challenges included:

- Working together
- Champions
- The work women see
- Not listening to those who try to hold you back
- Access and diversity

Other reports include a quantitative report on current data regarding gender parity and equality in the UK and a qualitative report on the position of women creatives in UK theatre.

The aim of these reports is to encourage and support awareness of gender parity and gender equality in UK theatre.

The author of this report is **Jennifer Tuckett**, researcher for *Sphinx Theatre Company*, who is also currently researching how to improve the transition for women from studying the arts to working in the arts at the *University of Cambridge*, and is Director of *University Women in the Arts*, which is run by *Art School*, the new organization supporting the arts industry and education sector to work together, and who, coming from a single parent not associated into the arts, has worked to help many women into their first jobs in the arts.



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Jennifer Tuckett is the researcher and author of these reports, which aim to improve awareness of gender parity and equality issues in UK theatre.

Jennifer is a researcher, writer, producer, consultant and academic, currently based at the University of Cambridge.