VAMPS, VIXENS AND FEMINISTS
FIGHTING THE BACKLASH

THE YOUNG VIC, THURSDAY 29TH OCTOBER 2010

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VAMPS, VIXENS AND FEMINISTS 2010: FIGHTING THE BACKLASH

28TH October, The Young Vic Theatre, 10.30am – 2.30pm

INTRODUCTION

Sue Parrish, Artistic Director of Sphinx Theatre Company, welcomes the audience and introduces the focus for the day's discussions.

A hush. A wonderful hush. Good morning. It is great to see you all for the second of our *Vamps Vixens and Feminists* conferences. Actually I would like to add Amazons to that line. Because that is what this conference is all about: doing it for ourselves. Last year's conference at the National Theatre was about making an audit of the current representation of women across the performing arts. This meeting will be about action.

There are lots of wonderful speakers here who are going to share with you their experiences of making their own individual or collective contribution to the progress of the representation of women across the arts. What's very exciting for me as an elderly person in this struggle – you may laugh, and I am glad to hear you laugh – that's so nice and very reassuring! However, it is true that the very first one of these conferences we did at the ICA was in 1979 and some of you were not born. So it has been a long, long conversation but, as we know from the history of revolutions of all sorts, it often is. However, as I say, today is to focus on strategies for going forward, for hearing wonderful nuggets from people who are trail blazers in their own particular field in the arts and who have come to share their experience with us and hopefully by the end we will have some concrete suggestions.

I am delighted that we have with us the General Secretary of Equity who has been so active on our part, Christine Payne and there is a lot in here about Equity who is one of our major collaborators on this conference and on the campaign, as you will hear.

As a treat for us, a homage to the theme of age and youth because we are bringing people here across 30, 40 years of experience, is a piece by Joan Micklin Silver: a wonderful feminist revue called "A… My Name is Alice" in 1993 and we have the young new graduates from the Mountview musical theatre course to set us off on the right course this morning before we get down and dirty with the debates.

A few thanks to do. I would like to thank the Young Vic for their great support and help in hosting this event. I would also like to thank our collaborators Equity, the Writers Guild, the Director's Guild, Women in Film and TV and especially the Diversity Department of the Arts Council England. And finally, ahead of the game, I would like to thank the brilliant band of speakers that are going to follow on this morning who have very generously made time from their busy schedules to be with us today. And so… now I hand you over. And now: "My Name is Alice".

"All Girl Band" from *"A… My Name is Alice" performed by the graduates of Mountview Post-Graduate Musical Theatre course.*

Now we get down to the serious stuff. Bea Campbell, as you know, is a most distinguished journalist and writer, and has most recently been writing wonderful articles in The Guardian, which I hope some of you have seen, ranging from Wayne Rooney and his proclivities, to Yvette Cooper and the serious business of the cuts and how they are going to affect women. So without further ado I will ask Bea Campbell to join us and address us.

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Beatrix Campbell draws attention to the shifting changes in society and calls for us to take action and seize the opportunities that these changes are giving us.

Beatrix Campbell is a writer and broadcaster. A regular contributor to *Any Questions* and *Question Time,* her work appears in The Guardian, The Independent, The Scotsman and academic journals. Beatrix co-wrote with Judith Jones the acclaimed play *BLAME* for Sphinx Theatre which toured nationally in 2007.

BEATRIX CAMPBELL

Hello my friends. Now I know what to do with my life: join an all girl band!

It is great to be at this event. It is great always to be at Sphinx's events because there is something about Sphinx that is really true to it's name, which is that it survives even in a desert. The marvellous thing about that long long energetic commitment to us, you, women, a better world, is that of course it now coincides with a really beautiful resurgence of feminist energy and feminist ideas. Particularly, I think, in London, and if you are not already connected to it then do connect to it: the London Feminist Network.

So the conversation we are going to have today is happening in the context of, on the one hand the reinvigoration of feminist ingenuity and imagination and effort and challenge, that coincides with the most challenging economic environment that any of us have ever seen in this country across our whole lives, and I will say something about that at the end. But I more generally want to share some thoughts about: how are we to think about now? What are the questions that we need to be asking that help us work out what it is that needed and needs to be sorted out?

So the question is: what is this moment that we are in? And the moment that we are in is, of course, very different and yet, as ever, plus ca change. I was just thinking, sitting next to my dear friend Ann Mitchell, about when we were in the 1970s in the women's liberation movement where the agendas and preoccupations and styles and things that could be anticipated were very very different. It was an optimistic time. The time that we are now in is a very pessimistic time and it is a dangerous time.

But I just want to share some thoughts about this question: what is this moment that we are in? And what is the character of the tumult that bubbles around this time. What does it tell us about, as I say, what needs to be sorted out? What are the questions that need answers? Well, one of the first things that is very interesting and indeed fabulous at the same time as being dreadful about now is that two words can be returned to our lips and they are: "capitalism" and "crisis". And they go together. And for the last two decades, of course, these words were not to be uttered in polite society and certainly not to be coupled together because capitalism was rampant and triumphant. Now we see something, we are all living with the consequences of something inherent in this system which is that capitalism is always in crisis: it may be triumphant, it may be dynamic and it may dominate the world however it is also unstable and inherently in a permanent state of crisis. And the trick for us is where to find our niches and not to be destroyed by them.

One of the things that should be said in addition to that is, isn't it a funny thing? In the "olden days" when people talked about capitalism in crisis what wasn't really imagined was that capitalism and crisis and the capitalist crisis was something to do with men. And you get odd situations now on Radio 4; people who know about sums and economics and stuff and banks, talking about the banking crisis as being something about blokes and "blokiness" and that faculty in certain cultures of masculinity, which seem inclined always to bring the world to the very brink. Now that's completely new. I don't think ever in the history of capitalism has it been judged rather than celebrated. But "judged" has something to do with the kinds of values and priorities sponsored by the cultures built around masculinity. I am not, I have to say, one of those people who think that men are just a bunch of bastards. I am an eternal optimist. I think that men can be helped, by us, to be better. To become human, or rather, improved humans. However, it is clear that cultures sponsored by masculinity as something exclusive to men, something that can only be preserved by the exclusion of women and the repudiation of cooperation with women, produces something which we now understand is dangerous. That's new.

I want to just chuck out a couple of other moments in the culture that we share and we are all participating in that are indicative of something that has changed.

The Pope. He comes to his reign thinking that his great mission, which no doubt he confidently believes could be realised, that the world would be re-evangelised. But no. A heroic, survivors' movement of people who have survived what men do when they are given the divine right to rule, has its come-uppance. And the Pope, everywhere he goes, has to answer for that. Here we have the most patriarchal mass movement in the world on its knees because men, priests, are being called to account for their abusive behaviour as men. Think about it. It is astounding. This is the biggest crisis in the Catholic Church since the end of the inquisition. It's astounding. And that survivors' movement connects directly to the kinds of systems, ideas, support networks, self help systems that feminism have constructed over the last 40 years. Because feminism has yielded some of the most marvellous survivor movements that are about the same sorts of issues as the survivors, men and women, of priestly abuse. I think this is completely significant. That Pope had to come to this country and face something at one level so prosaic and yet at another level so heart-stopping. A working class woman who would not be silenced because of the horrible things that his church did to her when she was little and has never apologised for. And she wouldn't go away. She insisted on seeing the whites of his eyes. And she insisted on him being faced with her. Astounding. That's happened this year, in our time.

Other terrible things happen, but they are also indicative of the way in which gender has become an argument. It isn't settled. It's uneasy, it's restless, it's vexatious. A young woman is murdered in South Africa because she dares to live as a lesbian. She dares to be a lesbian and she dies for it. The first is indicative of a new kind of courage among woman who are lesbians, facing a new kind of danger that is an answer to that explicit courage. But the world is outraged. It finds that unforgivable. That's new. Murdering lesbians makes the world angry. A woman is threatened by the state in Iran to be stoned to death. She can be stoned to death, she may be stoned to death, but the world is outraged. That is new. Iran has to deal with a different kind of fury from the one that it predictably generates as a fundamentalist state.

Wayne Rooney. I love this business about Wayne Rooney. I'll tell you why I love it: because there is something so delectable about the gross business of the tabloids and the way that they intrude on people's lives - it is gross, absolutely gross - but it calls all sorts of people to account, in the midst of its messy business, who should be called to account. And Wayne Rooney who earns, what is it - £1,000 a minute? If I had less pride I might write to him and say "give me some. I want some of

your money." We could all do it, today, write to him and say "give me some of your money as historical recompense". Anyway, what we learn about this man, actually, forgive me for being trivial about the tabloids and all of that, because the culture is very cruel. However he was asked a perfectly reasonable question when he had a baby. He was asked this question two weeks after he'd had the baby, in the context of people being somewhat astounded that he had had the baby for three days and he wanted to play football. Why would you want to play football when you've got a baby who's three days old? How could you take your eyes off that little being and want to go and play football? "How very very strange" I think people thought. And then two weeks later he was asked the question "and have you changed the baby's nappy?" and he said "no". And again, the world was fascinated, "what kind of being can this be, who has got the most beautiful thing in the world, a baby, and he doesn't know how to change its nappy." People were bewildered. I think that is very interesting and not the least, very interesting because all the men who think he is marvellous and watch him, I would think that the majority of them do change nappies and have seen their baby's bums and wiped them and wiped tears and done a bit of the business that they should be doing as fathers. So they were too involved in this conversation. I've had lots of conversations with men, more conversations than I've ever had in my whole life, about babies bottoms' in the context of Wayne Rooney. And it tells us something very important. That that is something that people think is very important. And that's great. That's changed. They didn't ask that question of Stanley Matthews. Those of you of a certain age will know who Stanley Matthews was.

And then, we learn that he has been with prostitutes when his wife was pregnant. That has become the site of a crisis. It has ruined his reputation, quite rightly. If it had been Stanley Matthews, and I'm sure he didn't, nobody would have known, and nobody would have cared because there would have been a view, it is still some people's view, that "well that is what men do". Well, no it's not actually - a lot of men don't do that. And something has emerged in the context of the sorts of questions that we raise as feminists about what it means to be a man, or rather, what we want it to mean to be a man. It is in the national conversation. It is the conversation that we are all having: men are having it as well. And it caused a crisis in that organisation that pays him £1000 a minute because historically that institution, Manchester United Football Club, which has lived with a prevailing view of masculinity which is that it is marauding and dangerous, thought that the way you sort it out is to get it married early. And that the wife will do what all of the great assemblies of masculine power fail to do: make these men honourable, make them worth it. Well, here we have an exemple of how that ancient patriarchal tradition, relying on wives to police men, doesn't work. And why the institutions that prize men and manage them have to take responsibility themselves for working out what the values are about this masculinity thing that they want to admire and that they would expect us to. In other words, all of this stuff is part of a national argument about what does it mean to be a man. What is masculinity? What is its relation to us?

A completely different, little thing that just erupts. During the election campaign I was canvassing for the Green Party around the Euston Road and I knocked on this door and there was a woman there who said she was a bit interested and I happened to say something about "the Green Party supports equality and equal pay…" and suddenly she erupted and said "did you see that thing in the paper about Birmingham?" Birmingham, if you remember, was the place where a group of 1000 cleaners and caterers won an equal pay deal that amounted to £200,000,000 which tells you what those thousand women had given, or rather, had had stolen from them, across the 6 to 10 years that their case was trying to address. Those women brought that equal pay case because a deal had been done, an ancient deal, about men and bonuses which exactly parallels the crisis in banking which of course is also about men and bonuses. And I throw that out there. Again, it is just

part of this little forest of things which is telling us that there is a tumult around gender. Gender is a fault line in our society that is now a *perceived* fault line.

Ok, that said, the final thing I want to share with you is this: what is the context in which we can concretely do something about all of this stuff to do with gender? And the distribution of power, money and resources between men and women in conditions where it appears that politically we have no champions even though gender, as I say, is this restless fault line that we are all living with, that we are all in – we are all in that argument?

Well, and this brings me to my final remarks, I want to stress a thing that even though it may not be very interesting it is really important: a thing called the Gender Duty in the Equality Act and it is a practice called Gender Equality Impact Assessment. The Fawcett Society is bringing a legal action against the government for the first time ever, about the sexism of its budget because, as you all know, women will bear 72% of the cost of the cuts this government is making to bring down the national deficit. It could do it a different way. It could do something completely different. Instead of cutting, and cutting provisions that are absolutely salient to the lives of women, it could raise taxes – not a terrible thing to do, our taxes are very low. That's another conversation. The thing that's important about this moment is that there is in legislation a duty upon all public authorities whatever they do, to consider what the impact on gender is and, if there is a disproportionate impact, a negative impact, for women, to attempt to mitigate that impact and do something about it. This is a completely different way of thinking about the promotion of equality from the old tradition of anti-discrimination work which requires those who are discriminated against to do something about the institutional weight of discrimination. It now gives to the state and to public authorities the responsibility themselves to consider it, to have due regard to it, to do something about it and, furthermore, to do it in consultation with us. Now, of course, they work on the assumption that we don't know anything about it. It falls to us therefore my friends to find out how to do something about it. And one of the easiest things you can do, even at a gathering like this, is to say to each other "we could write a letter to The National, our union will help us." Just to ask them: Gender Duty? Remember? Have you done an equality impact assessment? Has your local authority done an equality assessment? Has the arts and leisure committee of your local authority done an equality impact assessment? Where is it? Is it published? Can you find it? Can you argue with it? Can you come and see them and help them think about it? That's the best bit. "Let us help you," you can say. This is really serious because in the most inhospitable conditions that we could imagine, we are there bubbling, we are in the middle of a great argument, we are part of a national conversation that scarcely has any institutional articulation. The institutions have remained remarkably stable whilst out there in popular culture all of this stuff is bubbling. And there we now have a piece of legislation that's tricky, bureaucratic, but potentially really useful and you and I can use it. And we can use it by asking devastating questions about how resources are distributed and how we want to be involved in the political processes that produce outcomes that without us will be terrible. And there I finish, with one final phrase: Let's go to it - together. Thank you.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

Bidisha and Susannah Clapp reflect on the representation of women across the arts and criticism.

Bidisha is a critic, broadcaster and writer. She presents the World Service's arts programme, *The Strand* as well as various other documentaries and series for the BBC. As well as The Guardian she also writes for The Financial Times, Mslexia, The Fword, The Observer and New Statesman.

Susannah Clapp is the theatre critic of the Observer and of Radio 3's Nightwaves. She helped to set up the London Review of Books and is the author of *With Chatwin*, a portrait of Bruce Chatwin.

BIDISHA

Hi everyone and thank you for coming to Vamps, Vixens, Feminists and Amazons 2010 and thanks to the Young Vic for providing this venue. So here we are to celebrate women in the arts.

I write a lot about gender and society, and I speak a lot about it. And it is strange because every time I write any kind of article I think to myself, I send it off having written it at 3 in the morning obviously, really angry and then you look at it in the morning and think "really?", and I expect editors to send it back because what I am saying is so incredibly obvious because, in the old phrase of the women's liberation movement, "these ideas are the movement's ideas". So they derive from conversations I'm having with colleagues and friends all the time and they are very quick and easy to write because these are the ideas which have been percolating in all our minds over the last few months. And what's depressing is that these articles are not sent back to me. What happens is that they come out and I receive a disproportionately huge response from women who work in the arts but also the many women and men who spend their money to buy books, who care about book shortlists, who go to the theatre every week or every other week, who love films, who like to go to exhibitions. This is all the stuff of life and so when I point out that it is very rare that you have more than one or two women on a particular radio show, they write in saying "yes, we have noticed that too. What can we do?" The answer unfortunately is: I don't know.

I've worked in the media for nearly twenty years now and the majority of my colleagues, producers, executives have been women and what's happened is that we all feel the same way and yet we seem to be powerless to do anything at all and that so often when we raise an issue people wring their hands and go "oh no it is dreadful" and then nothing happens.
Anyway, six months ago I wrote an article which caused a huger splash than usual. It was called "Tired of Being the Token Woman" and it came out in *The Guardian* and in the wake of it I received many letters and emails and notes from people both within and without of the arts industries. I'm going to read an extract from that and then an extract from something I've been thinking about recently, in the six months since I wrote that first article.

> "Tired of Being the Token Woman (This was written in April).
>
> There's a special feeling I get when spring is in the air and my reawakened arty curiosity draws me into theatres, galleries and bookshops. That feeling is nausea. I felt it when I saw this week's edition of the London Review of Books. Twelve chaps and four lucky ladies have written in it. The previous edition had 11 men and three women. A fortnight before that there were 16 men and four women. But on 11 March

there were 25 eunuchs and a perfectly rendered wooden Pinocchio puppet. Only joking, it was 15 men and four women.

Get the picture? Check out the Art on the Underground posters currently on display on Tube platforms. Over the last few years, London Underground has commissioned a series of images incorporating the Underground sign. Dreary, I know. It has now grouped the different artists' works together. Of the two posters I've seen, one features 27 men and 10 women and the other features 26 men and 10 women.

No modern woman wants to find herself alone on a station platform, counting a poster. It's sad. But it's all part of my investigation into cultural femicide – the erasure of women from public life. Who are the perpetrators? Events organisers, editors in broadcasting and the media, radio and TV producers, commissioners and jurors. They are male and female, they probably don't realise they're doing it, but they don't mind. They're fine with a virtually woman-free world.

To witness femicide in action, go to the town of Hay this May. At the same time as the annual book festival is an unrelated philosophy festival called How The Light Gets In. There are 25 debates covering broad themes such as evolution, the urban space, creativity, violence and privacy. All but two of these events are male-dominated. Eight are men-only, opening with "Being Human in the 21st century." Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Four white men are going to discuss all the facets of the human experience. Thirteen discussions have just one woman and either four or three men, and one has one woman and two men. One event is a screening of a guy's film. Two talks have two men and two women. And that's it. I was scheduled to attend and was hugely relieved when other obligations meant I had to drop out. I know from experience that female participation in events that massively underrepresent women does not change anything. Year on year the ratio stays the same. How The Light Gets In gives 56 different men the opportunity to speak. It offers the same opportunity to just 11 women. Alongside the talks are evening events featuring a well-chosen and original roster of musicians, DJs and comedians. The gender balance here is markedly better. Did two different people organise these two sides of the festival? Perhaps women are considered fine as light entertainment, but unnecessary when it comes to the serious stuff.

We no longer live in an age where female thinkers, writers, philosophers, academics, artists, theorists, activists or politicians are rare. The discrimination is obvious. All you have to do is count. It's all the more galling given that women equal or outnumber men as attendees of arts festivals, concerts, readings, discussions and debates, and as arts and humanities students at university. Women write, read, edit and publicise more fiction than men. Women make up the majority of executive, PR and organisational staff in arts and cultural institutions. Women's ticket revenue, licence fees, book purchases and entrance fees are being used to fund events at which women artists and thinkers are marginalised with breathtaking obviousness.

Feeling sick yet? Wait: this summer the Serpentine Gallery celebrates its 10th pavilion commission, to be designed by Jean Nouvel. In 10 years, only one solo woman architect, Zaha Hadid, has sketched the Serpentine's garden tent. Curator Julia Peyton-Jones commented in a 2006 documentary about sexism in art that she didn't curate women-only shows, "because I don't think it serves women". She should know all about not serving women. The Serpentine's Poetry Marathon talks last year gave us 47

men and 18 women, as did its Manifesto Marathon the previous year. In 2007 and 2006 the event gave us 34 men and 10 women both times.

When discriminators are challenged they produce snivelling fudges and sideswipes. Ceri Thomas, editor of Today, denies that sexism is behind the programme having one woman out of five presenters and one woman out of every 10 contributors. What is it then? The whim of the Gods?

I used to power my way through every token-woman appearance on panels in the hope that the shining example of my contribution would change the paradigm through sheer force of presence. It didn't happen. Ten years ago I went on a British Council reading tour to Germany. I was the only woman out of four. This spring the British Council sent a group of British writers to tour India: six men, one woman. I left a high-profile arts magazine programme because on show after show, month after month, we averaged five or six men and one or two women. On several shows there were no women. My triumph was one edition featuring major interviews with Tracey Emin and theatre director Marianne Elliott.

Speaking of the theatre, don't go there. Literally. March to June at the National features 11 works written by men and, since Tamsin Oglesby's Really Old, Like Forty-Five finished on Tuesday, none by women. There's one woman director and that's Elliott. If you want to be "in conversation" with a British actor, you can choose from four chaps or Fiona Shaw. In the bookshop's biography section, man-worshipping volumes outnumber feminine fancies by roughly 20 to one. When I went, the only prominently displayed woman's book was Antonia Fraser's memoir about how much she worships a man, her late husband, Harold Pinter. It's called Must You Go? Must he go where? Must he go philandering, or must he go on writing sexist plays?

Want to bury your head in a more exotic tome? Ooh, no. The International Prize for Arabic Fiction has given us shortlists of five books by men and one by a woman in all three years of its existence. The juries have had one woman and three, four or five men. Think it's down to Arab conservatism? Hey, don't be so quick to throw stones, whitey: in 41 years of the Booker prize the jury has been male-dominated 30 times. There have been 28 male winners and 15 female winners. That said, the one time there were four women and one man on the jury, in 1986, they chose Kingsley Amis's The Old Devils over Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. God. Why do women love misogynists so much? Is it Stockholm syndrome?

Let me peruse something lighter, such as the Sunday papers. But research by Jane Mackenzie in the January to March issue of Mslexia magazine demonstrated that the coverage of books in the literary pages of the broadsheets overwhelmingly under-represented women and lionised men. When I sceptically did some adding myself, with the Sunday Times, I realised they'd reviewed 17 books by men and one by a woman. Yet every day at work I receive packages in which women's books outnumber those by men – and all look intriguing enough to cover.

Somehow, a decision is being made, probably subconsciously, about what is worthwhile and what is worthless. When I was judging the Orange prize last year we all noticed how major bookshops consistently stacked 10 men's books to every one woman's book on its "recommended read" tables – in whatever genre. In one bookshop, fellow judge Martha Lane Fox was told barefacedly by the sales guy that

this was because men published 10 times as much fiction as women. But as everyone knows, chaps are heavyweight colossal conceptual geniuses of quite massive greatness and literary ladies are clever little fairies, handstitching our charmingly personal tiny tales out of skirting-board dust and featherweight neuroses.

So what's the solution? The establishment, patriarchy, the mainstream, whatever you want to call it, just doesn't find women interesting. It makes sure that women are heavily outnumbered from the very beginning by offering us only a fraction of available opportunities, slots, placements, commissions, trips, panel places, star jobs, reviews. Later, it conveniently uses this to claim that there are not enough women "out there" to make a stronger impression higher up. It talks down women's work. It is supported by a false mythology about the weakness, inconsistency, subjectivity and inconsequentiality of women's creation, experience and perspective.

I can no longer give my time and attention – and implicitly, my support – to any event, such as the debates at How The Light Gets In, that gives space to five times as many men as women. I'd rather use my power to fight for women's voices to be heard, our talent to be celebrated, our participation in the world represented accurately, our intellect respected and our expertise honoured. It does not matter what sexist men or apolitical women think about this. The solution to discrimination is female solidarity and the deliberate concentration of women's power. But first I need some Pepto-Bismol."

Applause

That had a huge response and it sparked a wave of activism amongst women. But I am not sure of what it actually changed at the institutions that I am complaining about. I listened last night to "Nightwaves" a show which I used to present about a year and a half ago and nothing had changed at all.

Anyway, this is what I wrote yesterday:

"On Despair.

Six months ago I wrote an article entitled "Tired of Being the Token Woman" about the erasure of women from cultural life. It sparked a round of events and activism amongst women as well as some hilariously defensive chits from the perpetrators. The editors of everything from Roman Artefacts Review to Nose Pickers Weekly wrote in to give their excuses. They ought not to have fretted. The article made no difference. At the Waterstones on New Row in Covent Garden there are two tables labelled "Books we can't put down". A fortnight ago one of the tables had 42 authors of whom 4 were women, the other table had 45 authors of whom 4 were women. There was a wall display of philosophical fiction featuring novels by 21 different men and 0 women. Although Proust had 6 titles up there, so lucky him. Let's scroll back. Since the beginning of 2008 I've conducted author interviews with 49 men and less than half that number of women. In the Evening Standard summer reading roundup on 2nd July David Sexton recommended 16 books by men and 5 by women. Do you notice here, that the figures for women never really get above 10? In June the world literature weekend organised by the London Review Bookshop, 26 writers of which 4 were women. Of those, 2 were translated exclusively of men's work and one was talking about her father who had been a great writer. No, he really had, I can't

remember his name but he was excellent. This year's Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction, a genre utterly dominated by brilliant women, shortlisted 2 women and 5 men. The Dolman Prize for Travel Writing shortlisted one woman.

It is difficult to describe the sheer alienation one feels to participate in, even to chair and to moderate a discussion about art, politics, culture, the world, in which no woman or her achievements is mentioned once by anyone, at any time. I can't keep sitting in a radio studio feeding flattering questions to a guy who has written a good book and is busy name checking 20 other great dead white men while a female producer and a female PR gape like groupies and 10 works of actual genius by women fester in the bin. I've seen this happen, we get packages every single day and so often books by women are glanced at once and are literally put in the bin. Publishers would be shocked if they could see that happen. I pick them out of the bin, I read them, sometimes they are not that good. Often, these books are excellent and just as worthy of coverage as anything else. It is difficult to describe the surge of pain as one mentions a woman, any woman, in any context, only to see one's companion automatically roll their eyes then wait their way through the rest of the anecdote. It is devastating to begin pitching an item about an excellent book, play or film: "It's about this woman who…" and see your boss has already lost interest.

Should you complain outright, as a woman working within a corporation, there is always a moment when they look at you with open dislike and you realise you will never work for them again, and that part of your career is over. I have not been able to compel producers to have more women on the shows that I participate in. Instead the few female artists on the roster are pushed onto my shows to shut me up. They do not actually feature or employ any more women than before.

It is no longer a fresh challenge as it was when I was 14 and beginning my career. It is no longer baffling and frustrating, as it was later. It now makes one's skin crawl with claustrophobia, despair and crackling pain. There is a horrible sense of the realness and depth of cultural femicide as women are simply ignored. There is the deep dread of contemplating two more decades of this bullshit. There is a terrifying frustration of encountering so many women's own misogyny and submissiveness. Quote from the female lead producer on a flagship arts show which you will all know: "it's all blokes today so it would be good to get a female". Quote from the same producer a month later: "it's all men today so if you want to sandwich a female artist in between you can, if you want."

It is hard to watch discrimination up close in real time, and realise that these powerful women may do nothing at all to change things. A colleague snatched up a book by a famous misogynist writer and simpered "I know he hates women but you know I don't need to be his friend or anything". He doesn't want to be your friend, don't worry about being his friend. Another colleague said of a young American writer, "He came in, he wasn't particularly nice, he wasn't particularly friendly, he wasn't particularly respectful, but I kind of like what he is about." Poor little masochists dutifully scrubbing the steps of the boys' club forever. Their love is not reciprocated. I have been in too many meetings in this so called liberal arts world where anything a woman says is shot down, talked over, or simply ignored. I have been the token woman on countless panels, where on the rare occasions where a work by a woman is reviewed, it is brazenly set upon and ripped to shreds. Pettily, brutally, jeeringly, right down to it's last fibres, with disgusting zeal. I have seen in nearly 20 years that, at every

literary event, the audience is full of women and the stage is full of men. A telling image."

I am going to end there. But to counteract that, let me introduce the brilliant Susannah Clapp, who is the long time theatre critic of *The Observer*. She also writes for *The Guardian*, she is also the theatre critic of Nightwaves, which is the flagship arts show on Radio 3. She has written the biography of the writer and traveller Bruce Chatwin and is also at work on another volume. So please join me in welcoming Susannah Clapp.

Susannah, you are the theatre critic for the Observer and you are in fact one of the very few theatre critics who are women working today.

SUSANNAH CLAPP

It has got better. But there is an ill-explained lack of female critics. When I started writing about theatre for the "Observer" in 1997 there was only one other first-string female theatre critic (Georgina Brown of the Mail on Sunday). The number has increased, though not to anything like 50 per cent. When I asked one of my male colleagues why it is that there are almost no women in theatre criticism he said "Oh, well. Babies." I countered that argument and he said, and it is rather poignant in a way, "Actually I think it is really a very macho profession. It is all that walking alone at night." So sweet! Anyway, it has got better and there are now a few more women theatre critics.

I do actually think that for the ecology of the theatre that is crucial. Not because we respond in an essentially different way to plays. I certainly don't think that all women are more sensitised to the detail that we are supposed to be so good at and nor do I think that women playwrights write absolutely differently, though of course, in some respects, they do. But it actually does change a little the perception of what theatre might do. And by the way I have to correct you unusually. There is, at The National, at the moment a really excellent play written by a woman. Of course it was written in the 1940s but it is really good, it is called "Men Should Weep" by Ena Lamont Stuart.

BIDISHA

What about the fact that it's still considered worthy of comment when a play has a majority of female characters? Ena Lamont Stewart's career was destroyed in a sense because she was so marginalised and dismissed by this very small Glasgow theatre world that she existed in. And as a woman working in the arts you read her story and you think well, "there but for the grace of god go I", even though she was writing in the 40s.

SUSANNAH CLAPP

What is interesting is that you see eight women and one man on the stage, which is incredibly unusual. And the first question I was asked when reviewing this show on Nightwaves, in a bemused way by a man who had responded very deeply to the show in a subtle and generous and interesting way was, "Isn't it interesting, this show, it's about women but it seems to have a lot to say about men as well." And I thought well that means we've got nowhere! Such plays are being

discussed as if they were simply about women; plays with a predominance of male characters are generally assumed to be about everyone.

BIDISHA

It's supposed to be universal. But I remember a very young playwright called Penelope Skinner saying to me that there was a reviewer in a mainstream review addressing her as "little Miss Skinner". Everyone's gasping because of course we all recognise how utterly insulting that is. But it is a very obvious and unsubtle example of typical belittlement. Have you seen that to be the case?

SUSANNAH CLAPP

Well, it is interesting I am not so conscious of that. But in journalism and criticism there very often are, of course, adjectives about people's appearance that pretend to be adjectives of value. I mean, 'deft' is often used of women, for example.

BIDISHA

It means small, all these adjectives mean small. And we have: passionate, tender, closely observed. They are always actually things that describe womanhood rather than the novel or the play.

SUSANNAH CLAPP

Exactly. But I do think it is happening less in the theatre now. There has been a recent upsurge of work by playwrights who are women. The Royal Court has led the field here, with outstanding plays, some by extremely young women.

Interestingly, this is at a point when so many prominent financial commentators are women: Lucy Prebble's Enron was in the illuminating satirical vein of Caryl Churchill's Serious Money.

We seem slowly to be getting to the stage where the qualification "woman" isn't always placed before "playwright" when their work is reviewed. I think that is changing. It is changing simply because there are more of us.

BIDISHA

To what extent to you think it is institutional? There is a difference in practice between different theatres. For example, if you look at institutions like the Hampstead Theatre who put on excellent and extremely diverse shows in which gender is not even an issue, and then you look at the National. Or look at dance. Sadler's Wells famously got into trouble two years ago for commissioning an entire range of work that was only by male choreographers. And yet if you look at other venues for dance you see that they are not doing it. So it is very clear that when there is under-representation of women there are perpetrators. It's not something which arises by accident.

SUSANNAH CLAPP

Yes. I don't know what the explanation is in the case of the National. I would say that some of the most interesting work in physical theatre and non-traditional theatre, which often involves some sort of radical statement, is with companies such as Kneehigh, which is run by a woman: Emma Rice. And, she has come into the National. There was an interesting response to Kneehigh's

production of “A Matter of Life and Death” at the National. Kneehigh’s version had no detectable feminist influence by the way, but the production was vilified by the male overnight critics. And that caused Nicholas Hytner to make a statement: “Well let’s just wait and see whether it is dead white male critics or whether the women won’t say something different.” Which they did.

BIDISHA

Finally I want to say that every time I speak at one of these events there is always a long time activist who comes up and says “You know what, we’ve been saying this for thirty years now. The answer is always the same: collective action”. And I agree completely with what Beatrix Campbell says which is that if you don’t like something it’s not good enough to be one woman standing up or writing a letter. That doesn’t work. If you are 30 or 40 women it really, actually, does make a huge difference.

Do you think that part of this resurgence of activism around women and justice, women in society, women in economics, women in the arts, is due to the fact that so many women are noticing these things?

SUSANNAH CLAPP

I think that must be the case. It must be the case. But what I don’t know is how to go on from here. Apart from this.

BIDISHA

Complaining works. It doesn’t feel nice. It doesn’t feel nice when you complain because you feel like you are being petty and people are being shot or stoned in the street somewhere else and that complaining about theatre reviews isn’t the thing to do. But actually, my argument would be that everything matters. Small things, big things: we are not in a competition to see what the biggest problem is here.

SUSANNAH CLAPP

That’s right. I occasionally experiment with putting a she instead of a he as the main pronoun and occasionally putting particular remarks into a column in the hope that it will kick something off. The difficulty of course is that our vocabulary has already been denigrated by the opposition. There must be a vigilance on the part of critics (not least myself) in making sure that adjectival gender stereotyping –“shrill”, “blonde”, “hysterical” doesn[1]t grip their prose.

BIDISHA

On that note, thank you very much to Susannah Clapp.

CREATING THE ROLES AND EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES

Julia Pascal speaks with Guy Hibbert, Joy Wilkinson, Glen Walford, Maggie Steed, Ann Mitchell and Geoff Colman about strategies to create and extend challenging roles for women across the arts.

Julia Pascal is a playwright and theatre director. She has worked at the National Theatre, the Orange Tree and most London fringe venues. This year, New York's Lincoln Center workshopped her text *St Joan* and her version of *The Dybbuk* made its US debut at the Theater for the New City. She has also worked as an actor and journalist.

Guy Hibbert is an award winning screenwriter. He has twice received a BAFTA for Best Drama for *No Child of Mine* with Peter Kosminsky in 1997 and *Omagh* with Paul Greengrass in 2005. As well as writing for the BBC he runs his own production company, Tilting Ground Productions, with Lia Williams.

Joy Wilkinson is a playwright and screenwriter. Her plays include: *Fair* (Finborough Theatre and Trafalgar Studios), *Felt Effects* (Verity Bargate Award Winner and Theatre 503), *Now is the Time* (Tricycle Theatre: The Great Game Season) and *Acting Leader* (Tricycle Theatre: Women, Power and Politics Season). Joy was a graduate of the BBC's inaugural Writers' Academy and is a lead writer on "Doctors".

Glen Walford is an acclaimed international theatre director. Most recently she has directed *Shirley Valentine* at The Menier Chocolate Factory (which has now transferred to The Trafalgar Studios).

Geoffrey Colman is the Head of Acting at The Central School of Speech and Drama. Geoffrey is currently Artistic Director of *Festival 10* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket and one of the Haymarket's 'Associate Masters'.

Ann Mitchell is an award winning actress. She has worked across the UK in productions as diverse as *Angels in America, Hecuba* and *Through the Leaves* (Nominated as Best Actress for Olivier and Evening Standard Awards). Her television work includes *Diary of a Young Man, Widows* and *She's Out.*

Maggie Steed is an acclaimed actress of stage and screen. She has worked with the RSC, the National Theatre and across the UK. Her television work includes *Shine on Harvey Moon, Pie in the Sky* and *Born and Bred.* Recently she has appeared *on Minder, Sensitive Skin, Jam and Jerusalem* and the BBC's *Two Whites.*

JULIA PASCAL

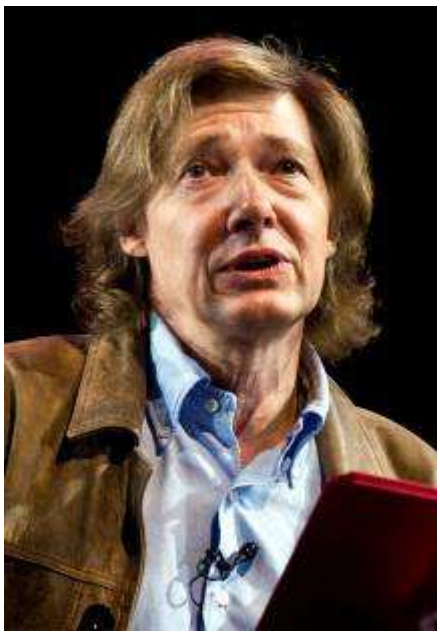
Good afternoon. We had a preliminary title called, "From Audit to Action", which excited me. I am a playwright and theatre director so action is what I love.

I would like to introduce this fantastic panel: Guy Hibbert, screenwriter, Joy Wilkinson, playwright and screenwriter, Glen Walford, director, Geoffrey Colman, the Head of Acting at the Central School of Speech and Drama, Ann Mitchell, actor, and Maggie Steed, actor.

I would like each of you just to say where you feel your work can respond to the issues spoken about today.

Let's start with Guy. You have written quite predominantly about the importance of female protagonists on the stage and on screen. Could you talk a little bit about that?

GUY HIBBERT



Yes, I certainly could. Thank you. I just wanted to start off by making a few statements which you may agree or disagree with.

The majority of people that I now work with on television on the pre-production side (and that's producers, executive producers, commissioners, development executives, programme controllers) are now female.

There is a macho executive culture in the film industry, but this is not so in the television industry. I have never felt any pressure from a producer to develop male characters in preference to female characters. I have, on one occasion, been asked to make a female character younger.

I just wanted to pick up on a Juliet Stevenson comment which I know is on the website for Sphinx. It is worth quoting again now because this is the key to what I want to say. She is quoted as saying: "it is intensely frustrating. The longer you live, the more interesting life gets and yet many of the parts involve carrying trays and putting lamb chops down in front of a leading man". It is a wonderful comment and I don't have the statistics to prove or disprove it but I think we all in this room instinctively feel that it's true. And for me that issue – the longer you live the more interesting life gets – is what needs to be addressed in the future by us all, but particularly writers if we are going to write intelligent parts for women over 40.

I do have some statistics. I don't want to bombard you with more statistics but they might be interesting for you in terms of my own work which I have done for the last 20 years, working in television. I largely write television films, not series, so in a sense they are my own work. I've broken it up into the first ten years and the second ten years.

<u>The first ten years: 1990 – 2000</u>
I've written 9 films, had 9 male directors and no female directors, 7 male producers and 3 female, no male script editors but 7 female, 8 male film editors and one female, 9 male cinematographers no female, the leading cast have been 9 male and 8 female.

<u>The second ten years: 2000 – 2010</u>
I've had 8 films produced, 6 male directors and 2 female directors (and I should add that the 2 female directors is one person and that is my wife: Lia Williams), I've had 4 male producers and 5 female producers, 1 male script editor and 1 female, 7 male film editors and 1 female, 8 male cinematographers and no female cinematographers and in the leading cast I had 6 male and 10 female.

Of that total cast I decided to break down the 18 female in terms of age:

Under 15:	1
15-30:	3
30-40:	9

40-50: 3
Over 50: 2

I think we are beginning to see Juliet Stevenson's argument there, certainly in the statistics of what I have written. And I think consciously writing those parts for women, particularly women over 40, is the key to change. The key is with the writers more so than anybody else. And possibly the producers who demand scripts from the writers.

If I could just say one more thing, I would just like to give an example of the last two pieces of work that I have done. One was "Blood and Oil" which was a piece about corruption in African politics and the oil industry which is a very male domain and was put on by the BBC in March this year. Because the story setting is a male environment the producer's presumption was that it would have male protagonists. My first decision was to have a female lead. Because of this male story environment I thought it would be even more interesting if I had two female leads. And so there again one needs to consciously work against the presumption.

The project that I am doing at the moment is set in China. When I was commissioned to write about China I had no idea what to write. Four years ago I read a book by Xinran called "The Good Women of China". It is a remarkable book in which women in a society where personal problems are very rarely openly discussed open up their hearts to her; she was then a radio presenter working in China. So my first decision was to meet Xinran and find a female story. As a consequence of this meeting my story developed into one between the mother and the daughter and in my subsequent research in China I met another very interesting woman and she became my third character. So for this story I have three female leads. And what I hope I am demonstrating in these two examples is a conscious decision to think female. And that the key to addressing intelligent parts for women and particularly those over 40, is the writer and it really is our responsibility.

JULIA PASCAL

Thank you very much. I'd like now to move on to Joy Wilkinson. Joy you have written for the stage and screen and recently you were part of the "Women Power and Politics" season at the Tricycle. Can you tell us how that came about and what you learnt from that?

JOY WILKINSON

Yes. I was one of nine female playwrights commissioned to write a half hour piece for a big cycle of plays about the history of women in power and politics. It came about because Nic Kent saw a photo of the then shadow cabinet, and the dearth of women in it and, as he did with Darfur and Afghanistan, he got really cross about it. And then he pretty much handed it all over to Indhu Rubasingham who curated the whole thing and directed it all. Nick very consciously stepped back. On the first day of rehearsal he came in to say hello to us all and then legged it so that he couldn't be accused of paternalism or anything.

Just being in that room was amazing because the bulk of performers in it were women, all the writers were women, the designers, there were a couple of guys who did some

carpentry and things for the sets, but it was a different atmosphere. I think even in the productions you could tell. There was one play by Zinnie Harris which, really provocatively, had an all male cast and the feeling was very different on stage during that. Also, I remember speaking to an actor that had been offered a part in it, a male actor, and he had turned it down. He said to me, "I just didn't feel that there was enough for me to do" and I think that's really interesting in this thing about Juliet Stevenson's comments and the parts that women will take and, I'm not saying that they shouldn't take them, because they have to work but…

Recently I was doing a radio play in which the protagonist was a woman and the male lead was very much a secondary part and we were talking about star casting and the producer said "I don't think we'll get anyone to do that part" and so we got someone from the Radio 4 company. There's a lesson there.

I think it is worth saying that although the Tricycle season was quite unusual in the number of women that worked on it, I came to one of these Sphinx events before and I remember Annie Castledine and Annabel Arden talking about trying to change the mode of production, sort of directing things together and doing things on a different model. It wasn't like that. It was still very much one director and all done in very a traditional way. But it wasn't trying to be sort of radical in that way. I think that is something that could be done differently.

Again, although it was a brilliant thing to be part of and a really positive thing for me, there was a really stinky review in *Time Out* by Andrew Hayden and, although obviously I disagree with most of it, the bit that he opened with just made me think, and I'm just going to read it out. He says: "British parliament like the Tricycle Theatre is still essentially run by men. Only 22% of MPs are women (143 out of 650) just as 17% of the playwrights who contributed plays to the Tricycle's last multi play cycle about Afghanistan were women (so there were only 2 out of 12). However, to explore the issue of women in political power, Nicolas Kent has graciously commissioned only female playwrights. It smacks of the worst sort of paternalist condescension imaginable." Now that's his opinion. But I think it taps into that bigger thing of, you do get a lot of women when it is something about women but there is a difficulty in finding women's stories about the bigger issues in the world. I think Enron and Posh are fantastic and it is fantastic that those women are getting their plays on, but the casts are casts of men and they are men's stories. The female part in Enron was made up – that was the only character that wasn't a real character in it and she is sort of shagged on a desk. So I think it is about what Guy says, about consciously thinking, "yes this is a male story but how can I find the female story within that?"

JULIA PASCAL

Glen you have a fabulously rich career as a director, you have worked internationally and most recently you directed Meera Syal. Can you talk a little bit about how gender and age have affected your long and established career?

GLEN WALFORD

Thank you very much for not calling me a veteran. I suppose that should be a mark of respect really because veterans are still fighting and they are still up there surviving. It's when you refer to me as a plucky old bird that I think I am for the funeral pyre.

Gender has been a problem in the past, although I have the kind of inbuilt ego that refuses to accept any kind of victimisation. I'll tell you one of my favourite stories, which shows how men thought way back in the seventies, and how I'm sure many of them think now though they dare not express such a thing. I was on a shortlist for running Crewe Theatre and I went into the interview, and it was all going quite nicely, and then one of the councillors said "Miss Walford, if we gave you this job, the General Manager is a male, and you, as Artistic Director would be over him, and you are a female." And then he leant back. Yes: that was it. He had made a statement, and I'm sure that that still exists only men don't dare speak that sin any more. But it is true that if a man and a woman are up for running a theatre it is quite likely that the man will get it. I mean, not in my case because again, ego helps.

And one of the things that I would really like to say is that one of my frustrations often with working with women is how they themselves collude with victimisation. And you can't get by with that. You really have to feel, and show that you feel, that you have massive power and massive amounts to give. And it happens quite often if I'm directing a woman and a man's scene, let's take Petruchio and Kate for instance, that a woman (actually I'm talking about workshops now) can often just give in to Petruchio's harassment instead of what is blatantly written, which is a game of poker basically, where Kate and Petruchio are fighting it out. I absolutely urge you not to give in to lack of confidence. I don't blame you for that, I don't blame myself for that, because believe me I may sit here looking incredibly confident but I suffer sleepless nights, I suffer terrible anguish from not being able to push through.

In fact, after 30 years of running theatres I finally said "no more" in 1989 and the reason was: you get worn down by campaigning and you all must go on. The younger people must pick up the gauntlet and battle of campaigning. But it has to be alongside creativity. Because I don't want to campaign just for an issue. I want to campaign so that I can be creative, so that creative juices may continue to flow.

Now then, massive plug, there are two matinees left of Shirley Valentine with Meera Syal. In that play, which I commissioned in 1985 at the Everyman, we have rave reviews from men and women because what they are seeing is not a woman having a massive and wonderful part in a play written by a man (with a very female inner I must say, but still, written by a man). What they are seeing in that play, which I really would like to think about, is a woman of middle age asking herself questions. Re-evaluating who she is and what she stands for now. And it is not dated. It's there, it is terrifyingly there, but it is also wonderfully there. Because it is redemptive. It tells the story, it has an Asian woman playing the part and there is no reference to anything – it is the play as it always was, but a triumph, of course, for Meera on that level.

And I would just like to say: go on being creative, let it go alongside the campaigning because an issue in itself is not enough. We are not social engineers, we should be creative women.

JULIA PASCAL

Thank you. I'd like to make that link to Maggie Steed. The problem of the inner conflict of being a political animal and a creative animal. You have a huge career and are well known for starting your career in left-wing political theatre. Could you talk about this conflict that Glen brought up?

MAGGIE STEED

I can talk about it. I think really just by going back to my own history, because actually I think the way Glen put it is fantastic and that it stands by itself.

The most wonderful thing about today was how it started, with those wonderful young women coming on and making us laugh - being so powerful because they had been allowed to be. And also, there was a group of them. If we are lucky enough to be employed, what we have to do all the time is make allowances in whatever job we are in. Whatever work we are doing, we make sure that we talk. Exactly what Glen is saying: be up for it; show that you have a lot to give and a lot to say. Always towards the project, and absolutely on the creative side. Then you are sort of leading by example, so that you are a feminist by example. Because that's what it's about, you know. It's about making those contacts, making alliances; it's about looking out for each other, being brave enough to make suggestions. Saying: 'you may shoot me down in flames, and I think what you are doing is wonderful, but how about..? or, have you thought of this'? Be open: practise being open. I think it is really, really important. And it is enlivening as well because we are so alienated.

Now that's inside work, where we get it. I'm about to play my very first 1930s grandmother – I'm shocked. Shocked. But I know that I am extremely lucky and I'm going to give this old girl my very best outing, and also make her as many-sided as possible. One of the things that I think I really liked from reading the reports from the last conference was this wonderful phrase that Viv Gardner talked about. It's about re-negotiating the image. It's a way of attacking stereotypes and received ideas. You can do it with anything. If you are lucky enough, God knows, to get a little part on television that is even dinner with the lamb chops, there is a way sometimes of just re-positioning. It's an art as well. But it is terribly important because it is seen by punters – they recognise it, they recognise it in you and they recognise the importance of the work. And it is amazing the sort of responses that you get. And you know that this work is important. And not just delivering a lamb chop. And I don't mean being an angry maid, you know, saying "there's your lamb chop". I mean filling it with life which is what our job is. But I think because we are so worried about the industry and about how lucky we are if we do get a job at all, and as you were saying the notion of being subservient, we actually have to really consciously make an effort to step outside that feeling of subservience. And one of the many ways of doing it, and one of the best ways of doing it, is to make alliances.

As Bea was saying, there is a tremendous amount of energy going on here with a lid on it with the official saying "yes, yes we have ticked all the boxes". And we have to be able to address what Glen said as well, the notion that it is all very well going to the National and saying "yes but you haven't employed enough women", but they're going to say "we've got to be free to be creative". We have to be able to come up with lists of ideas, of wonderful notions that will have people salivating. Because otherwise they will just go "well, there they go again". So our tactics have to be enlivening and humorous and full of dignity.

JULIA PASCAL

Of course we have Ann Mitchell sitting next to Maggie. Ann also has a hugely varied career – I've seen a lot of your work, big admirer. I would like you to respond to the same question really: the conflict between political action and extending the boundaries and creativity.

ANN MITCHELL

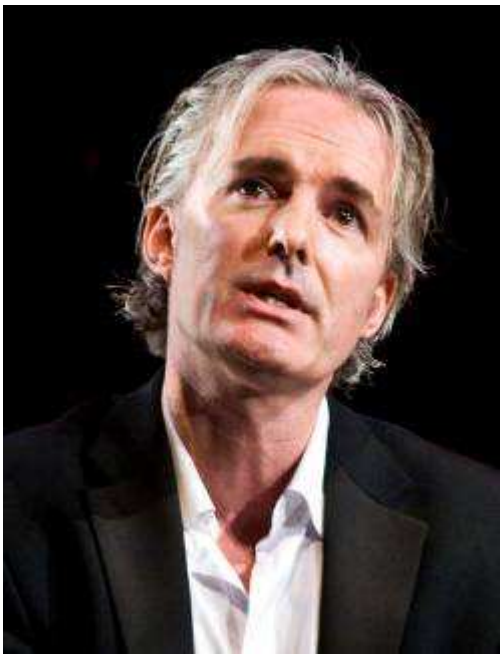
In a way there was never any conflict for me. I think today has been fascinating. I particularly agree with Guy, I think it starts with the writers. I think that the problem for us as women is that we don't honour our experiences. The perception that we live with from a very young age, the collusion that Glen is talking about, is in our veins and I think we have to start internally.

I was a political activist in the women's movement, and what I learnt after that was then to look inside myself: what I was really about, what was I really making an alliance with? Now the one word that has not been mentioned today here is class. There is another struggle. If you are from a working class background, you are going to have a double struggle. But one of the things that happened for me, because I am from a working class background, was that I had an internal mission. If you like, it was my mission to put working class people on a stage or on the screen that were complex and contradictory. I very much wanted to do that. For my family. I grew up, you know with the Ealing Comedy movies which I love of course. But I grew up with actors taking the piss out of my class and out of my people. And I wanted very much to redress the balance of that. So I am often broke, but I'll never do the lamb chop thing. Never do it. I couldn't actually do it. It is a physical impossibility for me, both for my class and as a woman.

But I really think for us now to move forward, absolutely we must make alliances. We must particularly make alliances with the young. There is no other way for me to be in the world other than to be helping the young and I hope that they would want to give their energy back to me. We have things to say. We need to find courage, the courage to refuse. This is partly what I am talking about. Many years ago I went for an interview for a trainee detective show. And Stephen Berkoff was playing the guest lead and I was at school, real school, with Stephen. And I got the script and the lines, and it was the first time in my life that I had ever counted them. I was about forty. And there were six lines. I was very broke, I was a single parent, I was working as a receptionist. And I went in and I read the six lines. And the director, Ian Toynton, said to me "oh that's fantastic, love you to do it." And I don't know where I said it from, ladies, I said, "No thank you. I am worth more than that". And 18 months later when Lynda LaPlante wrote "Widows" the casting director, Marilyn Johnson, put my name forward. Ian Toynton was the director and he said "yes, that's the kind of pride we need". I think we must have the courage to say no and to start, as I say, honouring our experience and honouring it together.

JULIA PASCAL

Geoffrey Colman, you have a long career as a director and professional acting coach. You are currently Head of Acting at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Could you speak about your attitude towards the training of female students?



GEOFFREY COLMAN

I've been at Central for about twelve years and been associated with the training sector for quite a while now. We have been talking this morning about institutions, the great monoliths and certainly the training of actors could be seen as a great monolith and as such there's a lot of accepted wisdom associated with that monolith! When I was first appointed as Head of Acting at Central I had a lot of questions about the plays that were being chosen by the sector – then I noticed, being newly appointed, that a lot of the female students were coming to my office and describing how they were not happy with their casting. Initially I thought it was the belligerent youth thing – you know, "I want a big role" - because I thought it was both men and women coming to me, but then I began to notice that it was just women because the men were really satisfied - for they were cast in the great classical roles - of which there are many - for men. The women were playing more maids than Lears. There seemed to be a really strange correlation between the really good acting that the women were doing, having really titchy parts and actually quite complacent so-so acting that the men were doing. The women were having a bit of a dog's dinner of it really, which began to really worry me - a bunch of plays that were predominantly driven by male narratives being used to train women. I began to make some changes which were initially very unpopular. I decided that the Third Year shouldn't just be a repository of dead plays and that "we always do…" mentality should in some way change. I introduced the notion of, gosh heaven forbid, new writing to the third year programme - remember that this was quite some time ago. In doing so I noticed that the complaints began to stop because the new writing didn't have the old stories, the old grand narratives of women, the diminished stories of women. Better stories, really. The new fancy, dandy plays that we put on were seen in some way as exotic. Questions were asked by agents and casting directors, and also by directors and the whole connected society to drama schools were questioned such a simple decision - to try to find material with good characters for women to play. A lot of the drama schools have a single gendered Shakespeare at some point in their training - that's great – women do get an opportunity to play more than just a servant nowadays - but I want to think about, not just training people for the past. Not just training actors to join the 19th Century.

A few years ago I decided to atomise the actor training into three distinct pathways. One of which was going to embrace new writing and devised work. I dared to introduce it onto a very established - historically renowned course course and not onto some polite little part time annex, it was on the big course! It was incredibly liberating. We have nearly 5,000 people applying to our course each year and there are about 11,000 people applying to be actors in the sector each year. Two thirds of them are women. If when they arrive they are not given the same opportunities - and challenging narratives they can develop worries about their own gender and their approach to their own gender as required by the industry. Occasionally drama schools notice that in the gap between second year and going into third year, female students aspire to female types as seen on bill boards and in magazines. When they return to study after the long summer

vacation we have to monitor that they are not thinner, lighter - wanting to sexualise and prettify themselves thinking that's what gets the industry dollar – a sort of glossed version. This pressure has to stop. The introduction of the new collaborative and devised pathway has enabled us to invite men and women to come and write for us and devise with us. There must be a place for our stories - men's and women's - in our cultural future. In a sense what I've been trying to do to is to address this.

JULIA PASCAL

Thank you Geoff. So now we have five minutes for questions and comments from the floor.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

I don't know if anyone saw in the paper on Tuesday, an article about Vanessa Redgrave in *Driving Miss Daisy,* saying: wasn't it incredible that she performed so well *at her age*. Why was nothing mentioned about her co-star, James Earl Jones, who is of an equivalent age?

JULIA PASCAL

That is an area we haven't discussed too much, and that is ageism. Not only being marginalised as a woman and being marginalised as a woman of a certain age.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

I'd like to follow up on that by stating that anyone who has read an article of that type has a responsibility then to go back to the newspaper and say: well why is your bias so strongly about remarks about her age and her gender rather than just that it was a remarkable performance, well done – she is a very brave actress. We all have fathers. Some of us have brothers. Some of us have cousins, some of us have sons, some of us have grandchildren. All of us have the responsibility not to let the status quo just continue.

I'm sure I have driven my sons crazy; every time they were watching Star Trek I would say "Oh look! The female aliens have got fewer clothes on than the men – isn't it remarkable how they survive on this planet?" But of course they would just watch it if I didn't do that. Of course they had lots of male testosterone when they were teenagers – they went off and knocked seven bells out of each other playing American football, but they haven't now, as mature adults, continued in that biased, macho, male role. So I just want to remind everyone that all the time you have a responsibility.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2

Talking about the issue of pride and what you are willing to do: And feeling an enormous sense of the impending paradox of cuts. That actually, it might help redress the balance because women are actually prepared to work at the new low rates whereas men might not be. I wondered what you thought about that, whether you thought that might happen.

ANN MITCHELL

I can't see that that would be a good thing for men or women. Any more of us being undervalued cannot be a good thing. Psychologically, being actors – we are always in the hands of somebody else – what does that do to us? We don't earn any money. These kinds of questions should now be asked at drama schools to all of us. Are you prepared to spend a life where you do not have

financial security? Now that is a very important question for a human being. So I would rather we all fought against any reduction in what we are paid; we are paid so little anyway.

GLEN WALFORD

The trouble of course is that the 'powers that be' undervalue the arts because we like what we do. And that causes immense resentment. It also causes low pay because if you are having a good time, how dare you ask to be paid as well. I don't have an answer to this other than inspiring the people in charge of the money. Showing them what kicks they get out of theatre, and how they share the joy in what we do and that somehow there is graft in it that they never seem to be aware of.

Also the media have to be worked on. I watched ITV news the other night when the leading question, like referendums, was: "so we want your responses by email: do you think the arts are more important than hospitals and schools?" What's the point of even staying tuned in after that? Because to Joe public, all these 'poofs' and 'fairies' and 'gays' dancing around doing theatre – of course we have got to have hospitals and schools. What they forget is that what's the point of education unless you share joy? Unless you share the challenge of being alive? What's the point of getting better in hospital if you are living in a depressed recessionary community? That just somehow has to go on being pointed out. 'Twas ever thus. You just have to go on saying it.

MAGGIE STEED

I think this begs the question about how we should proceed in the face of what's going on. And I was talking about surviving if one is lucky enough to get work – tactics for survival. And not just tactics for survival, but in order to make the best work possible. I think that when we are all out of work, as we all know, we are very alienated. Any confidence and creative drive can get sapped very easily. And I think that we should start thinking about some way of setting up some regular forums for each other. So that we know that there are places that we can come and we can meet. And we can kick this about, and we can think of ideas that we can take to theatres and we can come with a package of ideas to work with. And we need to start thinking of work ourselves because we are in for some very, very tough times ahead. This is a paradox of course. Because when that happens, people do start lighting the fires and sitting around and talking and working things out on their own and I think that's one of the things that we should think about taking from a meeting like this. As was said before, thirty people can be heard, one person can't. People get tired of hearing one person. We have to get together and be creative.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3

I'd just like to remind everyone that now we have the Equalities Act on our side and that now it is a legal requirement – how that can be enforced? I think that it is a paradox that the government passes this act and has now made it so that women bear 72% of the brunt of the cuts. This doesn't make sense to me.

MAGGIE STEED

Casual misogyny. It's the nice bloke syndrome.

JULIA PASCAL

I just want to say that that is something we will pick up on at the end. And it is a very important change that we now have this political muscle. We are entitled to use it and we must use it.

MAGGIE STEED

And we must learn how to flex it again and I think that the way to do that is to make sure that we can somehow just keep meeting.

ANN MITCHELL

I absolutely agree with that, very passionately. And I am also very interested in the psychology of what it means to be an Actor. Not what it means to create a role, or be in a company, but what it means to live the life of an Actor. And I think that's something we should be addressing in order to help one another when we are not working, when we are not allowed to be creative.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 4

I was really heartened by what Geoff Colman had to say about his approach at Central. How can we bring that kind of approach into all the other drama schools? Not just drama schools, but also directing courses and writing courses. Because it's about starting it from the bottom. And I was lucky at drama school because I did well with my parts in third year, but not everyone else was. And thinking about it now, I also experienced that comment about prettying up. Not something I intended to do myself; I was advised by my head of acting, who was a man, to grow my hair, I had short hair like I do now. And I was advised, partly on the basis of being versatile, but also partly it would 'soften me', I quote. I unfortunately did follow the advice and it did prove versatile, but eventually I got to the point where I realised this was who I was.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 5

One of the means of survival for actors, writers, directors, and it's not just survival financially, but also survival creatively, is to teach. We work in drama schools and we work in universities. And we are being double cut in that area. I work in a university and we've just had a 6% cut. But what is worse than that, in order to bring in that cut, they've downgraded us; our status, our level. We have to be on the lookout, and we have to, as you say, get together and discuss this.

JULIA PASCAL

Thank you very much. I'm sorry for those that still have questions but I think we have to move on to the next panel.

SUE PARRISH

Thank you very much. Today it really comes back to this business of the objectifying lens: it's about the objectification of women, which is a cliché of course, but on many psychological and cultural levels still operates which is what we have heard through the witnesses today. And breaking through that objectifying lens, finding ways to analyse it and present a non-objectified woman, or female, is something that we are obviously all engaged in, and what we need is the tools to be able to explain that to people like artistic directors and programmers and people who commission programmes.

SUSTAINING THE NETWORK

Julia Pascal speaks with Jean Rogers, Kate Kinninmont and Sarah Rushton-Read about strategies that Equity, WFTV and WiSE are putting in place to maintain networks across the industry.

Jean Rogers is an admired actress and has been Vice President of Equity for five years. Jean is also Chairman of British Equity Collecting Society and Chair of the West End Negotiating Team, Anti-censorship and Advertising in New Media working parties, as well as being a member of FIA Gender Equality Group.

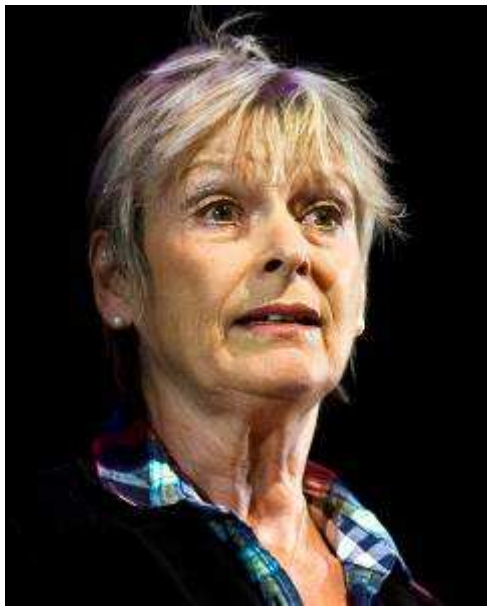
Kate Kinninmont is Chief Executive of Women in Film and TV, the voice of women in creative media. Kate is an award-winning TV producer and director.

Sarah Rushton-Read co-founded Women in Stage Entertainment (WiSE) with Paule Constable, which currently has 275 members. She has worked as a lighting designer and technician across the entertainment industry. She currently works as a freelance journalist, copywriter and photographer.

JULIA PASCAL

This second panel this afternoon is called *Sustaining the Network*. We have Jean Rogers who is Vice President of Equity, Kate Kinninmont, director of Women in Film and Television and Sarah Rushton Read, founder and director of Women in Stage Entertainment.

JEAN ROGERS



This has all been very exciting. There are so many ideas in the air. Having heard Bea and Bidisha who are erudite with words, it makes me realise why I am an actress and not a writer. Forgive me if I read a few things out so that I don't lose track.

I really believe that Equity and the Equity campaign is the way forward for us now. This is the campaign for the portrayal of women, for Gender Equality and also against ageism which is why women's careers just peter out and the men's take over. I believe that what Equity can do is ask the questions. And demand the answers. And they can do that to the funders, to the broadcasters, to the employers. They can also lobby government; our government and the European parliament. And they can also protest on our behalf. We have nearly 37,000 members and 18,000 plus of those are women. We have a strong voice.

So what have we been doing recently? Since the last conference that Sphinx organised and since we published the FIA research last year on work opportunities in Europe for performers, we have been working on good practice and strategies to engender change. We have done this by having 5 seminars across Europe. We have had seminars in France, Belgium, Scandinavia and Slovenia. Equity and Irish Equity had a conference in Edinburgh earlier this year and we discussed where we wanted to go and what kind of good practice we wanted to see in this industry.

We also touched on drama schools and their responsibility. We felt that drama schools were bringing, particularly women, into the profession in a stereotyped way and we felt that was wrong.

But that is what the industry, and Geoff said that, the industry is saying "we want women to look like this" and that's got to be wrong – are the drama schools there as an artistic foundation for our industry? Or just there to promote commercialism? So that was one of the things that we talked about. And then all the results, the good practice, the strategies that came out of those seminars, were collected and we had a final conference in June. I'm really pleased our General Secretary Christine was there, and we looked at what was coming out of the different parts of Europe. Very similar of course – this is a worldwide problem. And we were discussing how we could put it into a handbook which would be like a toolbox which we could give to employers and funding bodies and so on, saying what individual countries were doing and what more we wanted to see done. Now the sad thing was that we felt that our contribution as the United Kingdom was pretty poor really. We had contributions from Sphinx, Women in Film and Television, Birds Eye View – all women organisations that were trying to change things. But nothing really that was coming out of the employers, or the producers. Whereas there were things coming out of the Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden which I will touch on later.

We held this conference in the European Parliament and we had three members of the European Parliament there which was great and one of them was our British MEP, Mary Honeyball who has been very supportive. She said in an article in *The Stage* that she believes that the existing European Union anti-discrimination legislation should be amended so that it specifically targets the performing arts so that's something we have to keep an eye on and try to get done.

I'll come back to what other countries are doing. But what I want to say now is that I really think we are getting into exciting times. It's like *The Tale of Two Cities* – it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Yes, it is the worst of times for us as women to say "what about our share?" The share is so small anyway. And we will fight with the men to get the funding situation sorted, but why should we have even fewer crumbs under the table? Now is our opportunity when things are so dire to say "when you get it sorted, get it fairly sorted." And as the voice of the ordinary female member now can come up through the women's committee, it has been quite a busy year.

The Women's Committee has been supporting and encouraging women to stand for council and this year we had our council elections and it is beginning to get through because for the first time in our 80 year history we have a majority of women on the council. Now, that for me, as an officer, is fantastic. It means now that a motion coming up from the ARC from the Woman's Committee about gender now has a real opportunity to be debated fully in council and actually have some kind of impact on policy.

One of the things that I am very keen on is that we have to mainstream gender into all the issues that Equity deals with. All the bloke's issues – they have been bloke's issues, but they are our issues – we owe that to half our membership. One of the ways in which we can do that: Equity had to give written evidence to the Cultural, Media and Sport Committee enquiry into the funding of the arts and heritage. We have made sure that gender goes into that, and the Gender Equality Duty – it's there, it ripples through that brief, as it were - whereas, before, it might have been in a paragraph at the end. Also, we had the Manifesto for Theatre conference at the Lyric Hammersmith earlier this year and the Women's Committee beavered away in order to get the 2009 casting details in the subsidised repertory companies across the UK, because we know that, particularly in the well-funded theatres, there's more men's stories told. We know that the casting is more men than women, but we must have the facts: they brought the facts and we were able to talk about the issue accurately at the Manifesto for Theatre.

The Royal Court, which has been mentioned today, had a great Gender Equality record in their programming, as did Manchester Royal Exchange. But the National, in 2009: The White Guard, 20

men, 1 woman; Habit of Art, 9 men, 2 women; The Power of Yes, 17 men, 3 women. Down the road at the Old Vic: Six Degrees of Separation, 12 men and 4 women. Now I know you could say Nicholas Hytner is not to blame but all these Artistic Directors have choice. They can choose. There are plays written by women, there are plays written by men, there are casts which have an equal share of men and women roles. They can choose those. They have that power. And we have to make them aware that choice is important. We have a motion coming from the Women's Committee to council next week which is asking that a letter be written by the General Secretary on behalf of the Women's Committee to go out to the subsidised rep theatres saying well done on your choice in 2009 your gender spread was absolutely spot on, or we do feel you could do better next time and in that way just get them to realise that they do have the duty and what are they doing about it which is what has been talked about earlier. We are even considering some sort of a kite mark that we can give to good boys and girls who behave well.

The women's open meeting that we had the week before last was full of energy. There were about 70 Equity women who turned up for that. We had the opportunity to challenge the Arts Council of England's Head of Diversity on their Gender Equality Scheme documents which a lot of us felt were a bit woolly, and it has a mixture of Gender and Diversity as though they are all the same. We are all for, we want, diversity, but we want diversity within the genders. We want age representing, we want ethnic backgrounds, and we want disabilities. All those kind of things that make up the fabric of our society and should make art vibrate. And from that we have a promise that the equalities officer, Max, Christine and myself will meet with Tony at his offices in ACE in December and we are going to follow that up and we are going to ask the questions, aren't we Christine? We really are; because we want auditing.

Funded bodies must adhere to the 2007 Gender Equality Duty and put monitoring and auditing structures in place to retrospectively and prospectively assess the number of female and male performers appearing in productions. 80% of theatre tickets are bought by women, 52% of the population are women – they need to see themselves on the stage, and on television, and on the radio and so on.

So this brings me to the future now and this handbook of good practices which is going to be launched Euro-wide, simultaneously, on the 29th November. And I just want to quickly touch on what other countries are doing: In Norway and Sweden there is very useful legislation to mandate organisations which receive government funding to do a yearly audit to assess the gender balance. I think we can do the same. In Spain, Sweden, Finland and Norway, funders encourage gender balance in front of and behind the scenes in theatre and television. In Spain there is an equalities officer who visits theatres and other production workplaces and gives the seal of approval for good gender balance. It was very clear from the many strategies outlined in a number of European countries that they have taken the gender issue forward in a much more positive manner than we've done here. Scandinavian laws encourage a 40/60 balance on boards. On all boards. That would make such a difference to the way theatres were run. And Sweden in particular has introduced an auditing of programming in subsidised theatres as a yearly activity, along with a leadership training scheme to encourage women to become Artistic Directors, and of leading companies: opera, ballet and theatre. The other thing from Sweden: Stuart Karlsson, who is the Swedish equivalent of our SALT, TMA Chief Executive Richard Pulford, spoke glowingly of how applying gender equality to casts and administration had injected life, vigour and success into Swedish theatre. And we must press for the same kind of involvement, I feel.

We've got the petition, the viewers' petition. 9,000 now, we want it to be 10,000. We have to encourage the viewers to sign that. Those that have are voicing their concern that they don't see themselves in the television or in film. And we have that responsibility to them and I think that if

we can get it right in our industry we can help the whole of the women's movement in their entire desperate attempt to get through the concrete ceiling. They feel as though they are on their own.

So this is my other message, that maintaining the links with other organisations are really vital. We've got strong ones with FIA, the Federation of International Actors, the Writers Guild, BECTU, UNIME which is rather like BECTU but includes all the different organisations across Europe, the TUC, Women in Film and Television and I know that Kate will talk about her recent initiative on ageism. These coalitions are vital and I am just going to read something from a European raconteur called Dorothy Schtump. She is Swiss and she has written a report on sexism in the media. She said, "I'm convinced that we have to get together and influence the media industry to take up their responsibility to work towards real equality. Therefore I am very interested in your handbook of best practice as we suggested to the council of ministers of the council of Europe that they should have a handbook published with recommendations and best practice."

Now, two other things: We have got to keep our eye on the games industry. It is a growing industry and it is male dominated. You have to encourage your writers, your women writers to write for it, your directors to direct for it. The stereotyping of women within those successful games is really horrifying. And we have to change it. Equity has got its eye on it. And so must everybody else. And lastly, I do think we all know the artistic argument as to why we should be there: that we have things to contribute and that the industry is fallow without our input but I think we also need to push the economic argument. We have to be clever at this point, especially when the economics is a problem. We have to get facts and figures and any facts and figures – you give them to me. We know about *Mamma Mia*, we know about *Calendar Girls.* They had financial success. There was a show that Sam Walters put on at the Orange Tree which was a 1930's play called Alison's House and at the Manifesto of Theatre when I said 80% of tickets were bought by women he said "is that true?" I said "yes. That apparently is a fact." He said, "Oh how interesting." And he said that he did this play and apparently the critics panned it but the women came in droves to it because it was a play written by women and there were women's stories being told. So we have to tap into that. So any kind of information you have on it please just give it to us so that we can make that economic argument strong.

So here we are. In 2008, Equity led the industry in voicing how upset we were, as practitioners, about arts funding, the way that the Arts Council was operating. That turned a corner in how the Arts Council looks upon our industry now. Let's make today, which is again in the Young Vic, the same kind of occasion where we don't give into being patted on the head with a, "you've had your say, well done girls" and then go away and play – we just continue with this and we get somewhere. Thank you.

JULIA PASCAL

Thank you – extremely inspirational. Kate Kinninmont, director of Women in Film and Television I've also been inspired by your meetings and your work. Perhaps you could tell us a little bit about that, so that we can see the connections with theatre.

KATE KINNINMONT

Women in Film and Television was set up 21 years ago. It is our 21st birthday and we are proud. 21 years ago a group of women got together because they were so fed up with the inequality in film and television. This was quite a motley group of people. There were producers and directors there; Norma Haymen, Janet Street Porter, Joan Collins all dressed in pink – you know, you would never have got such a disparate group of women together, it was very strange casting. But what they all had in common was, what all of us have got in common is, that you are working very much on your own. Now, actors have always had that, but over the last few years it has happened to the whole industry. Everybody is now freelance. So whether you are a director, make up person, producer, even within the BBC, people are all on contracts. Every single person has really got to reach out and to network. How do we get jobs? We network. You never see in the guardian media section: actors required, or directors required or writers required or script editors required because that is not how our industry works.

Now picking up on what some of the earlier speakers said, I think networking, partnerships, collaboration, co-production, whatever you call it, is crucial; we have got to work together. I've actually seen a difference over the last 21 years. Interestingly one of the audience members mentioned the new Equality Act which came out on the 1st October; I remember the previous one 40 years before that which basically was saying all the same things – so legislation is not what's going to change it. What's going to change things for all of us as individuals, and as a group of women working in the industry, is a cultural shift and I think the only way we can do that is through joining a group – together we are strong.

I take my hat off to Equity, I think it is fantastic. A couple of your Women's Committee in fact are directors on the board of Women in Film: Joan Blackham and Joan Beverage who are here today. I think Equity does a fantastic job and you have got thousands of members and now you have got a majority of women on your management, and you are actually headed up by Christine and Jean. Now that should really help you to move forward. In our organisation we are all women anyway and people used to say: aren't you being very separatist, why do you have a separate area for women, isn't it going to be a ghetto? People like David Putnum wondered if we were mad. But in fact it has given us a huge strength because we are now finding that all the other organisations are looking to us because they know that they have got to do something about gender equality. Skillset recently brought out statistics based on the annual census that they do throughout the television industry which found that a majority of new entrants to television are women. Those women are more highly qualified, often with two degrees, they do more training courses, they work longer hours. But by the age of 35 half the women had disappeared. It is a fact that half of the women working in television in the UK are now under 35. So if you have got a daughter thinking of training to go into television, she does her good degree, she comes out when she's 24, she's got a 50% chance of having a 12 year career. That is quite frightening. And so now organisations are coming to us, everybody from BBC, UK Film Council and so forth, is saying "what are we going to do about the women?"

Well, we've got a few ideas. We are starting, it will launch in January, a mentoring scheme for older women. I think people coming into the industry, there's masses of them, there are 32,000 graduates in film and media every year, come into the industry ready to work for nothing. What

we are looking at is getting women who have already been in the industry for years mentoring. It's very interesting that we've decided to have male and female mentors. For example, Danny Corn who was controller of BBC Three and who has just been made controller of BBC One. We contacted him and said "Oh congratulations that's fantastic, top job in broadcasting. Will you still be able to mentor?" His answer: "Of course I'll still be able to mentor. This is really important." And so he is at present running two major television channels of the UK, he is going to have one of the top jobs in the UK, but he still thinks it's important to mentor a middle ranking woman in the industry because he is worried about the lack of diversity.

Another thing we are doing is tackling ageism in more of a lobbying campaign. One of my members, Miriam O'Reilly, was a presenter on Countryfile. Countryfile is a programme that young people really don't watch. Let's face it. If we look at the average age of people that watch television, it is about 56. Now I would imagine that people watching Countryfile are maybe 10 years older than that. When they moved the show to peak time, the BBC decided to 'refresh' the presenters. That's the word they used for Arlene Philips as well incidentally. And they replaced the middle aged women with young women but they kept the older chaps including John Craven, who is 69. For the previous few weeks the women had been told, "whenever high definition comes in you women are going to have to think about botox." But you know the funny thing is, the men don't. Isn't it amazing how high definition television can affect the women but not the men? Nobody, believe me, said to John Craven "You've got to think about Botox". So what's happening is next week on 4th November Miriam O'Reilly is taking the BBC to an industrial tribunal on the grounds of gender and ageism because she lost her job. In the meantime of course her ex-employer is offering her lots of money not to take the case to court which involves, what they call, a gagging order. And that's happened to people in the past. So it's not just about the actors on the screen, it is about everybody on the screen. You look at "Strictly" and you have got Brucey, 80 years old, paired up with a girl young enough to be his granddaughter. When did you ever see an 80 year old woman with a toyboy, on an entertainment show? I actually ran a competition in Broadcast last year asking people if they could find such a pairing and I've still got the bottle of champagne in the office because nobody could find it.

Now, I think the only way that we can move ahead in these sorts of areas is for people to get together – it's a very old idea but that's how unions started – and I think that if you are in Equity then that's great, if you are not then maybe you should be thinking about BECTU. I think it's really important for everybody to have a louder voice, and the only way you'll have a louder voice is by getting together. That's what is so exciting about what Sphinx Theatre have been doing this year and last year. Would you all have been here together discussing this if Sphinx hadn't invited us all? No you wouldn't. And I hope that by the end of today you might have a way forward. I could go on forever but I think that my message is that together we are strong.

JULIA PASCAL

I'd like to move on to Sarah Rushton-Read, the director of Women in Stage Entertainment.

SARAH RUSHTON-READ

We set up Women in Stage Entertainment to represent women working in backstage areas where the jobs are actually considered to be men's jobs, and women are at times lucky to be allowed to do them. So we quite often found ourselves, this is when I first started twenty years ago, actually competing with

other women for the jobs that the men just got as a matter of course. So we kept very quiet about our situations. And our situations were dire. I mean, I worked at the Royal Opera House and whilst I was plugging up the dips I would have a guy come up to me and say "while you're down there darling suck on this". That wasn't unusual in my workplace. So we women didn't really get together, in fact we saw each other as the enemy. And it is only in recent years that we have been able to come together. Paule Constable who is a lighting designer, and I have been getting together and saying "Why are women so underrepresented in our industry as lighting designers, technicians, electricians, engineers, when 50/50 are being trained in colleges?" And as you say, by the age of 35 they are out of there and they are never coming back because they are not helped to come back into the industry.

Women in Stage Entertainment in just 18 months has got over 300 members now (all women obviously) and we are surprised at that because we started as a drinking group of lighting designers. So, and I have to say this actually, when we started talking and discussing work, not being used to calling attention to ourselves, very much trying to be men in a male dominated environment and not being obvious or being unable to carry something or whatever it was, when we started to talk about work we would always precede our comments with "oh it's nothing really but..." Or, "it was a long time ago but..." "It might just be me but..." And we started to see that there are still huge common issues that are going on in our industry that need to be addressed. In terms of training, women get pushed to the back of technical environments and it is the boys who have got their hands on the toys.

Our aim now is to promote positive female role-models within our industry. We have set up a mentorship programme where women who have made it to the top, higher echelons of the industry will mentor young girls and young boys and try to promote that women are out there doing great things. We are also offering support; life long training is another thing we would like to do. Because when women leave our industry, as it is predominantly freelance, it is very difficult to come back after you have had children. Women lose confidence because they have been out of the industry. It is a technologically driven industry and technology moves on very quickly. We have been looking at job sharing and taking the stigma out of job sharing. I met a fabulous woman who, not because she had children or anything, just decided she wanted to have more of a life and so decided to do a job share. I think that's brilliant. There are so many opportunities for women to do great things, especially with theatre and production where something can go out on tour and somebody else can take over if it's very well documented, we have good paperwork: you can afford to drop dead.

And telling our stories: What our experiences were. Because to be honest with you, for twenty years, I have kept my mouth shut. I was the subject of a gagging order at the Royal Opera House where I was assaulted by a member of the crew and where I tried to address that issue. In the end I took time off with stress and was then disciplined for it. So I went to my union. I took the Royal Opera House to task and I was told to keep my mouth shut and they paid me off. I was in the early stages of my career and I didn't want to compromise myself; I was told I was a troublemaker. I was this, that and the other. I was only 24 when I took them to court but I had a baby and I had decided that this was what my career was going to be. I was also a single parent working 15 hour days, but that's another issue.

So yes, we are in the early stages of what we are doing. We are all working in other careers and we have set up a networking site. What I have found most remarkable about all of this is that all these women have come together and that we feel supported and strong. We feel that there are other people out there with the same experiences.

So this year, I'll finish here, we did an event at a very male dominated trade show called Plaza which is all about selling the kit to the end users, the hire companies, and we did Tea O'Clock which was a kind of tongue in check, ironic, laugh at the veer of bravado that dominates trade shows like that. And you can walk into that trade show and not see a woman. And the first woman that you do see, still today, on some of the stands, are dolly girls dressed up, short skirts and you know they are saying, the buyers of this technology are men. Well, they are not. There's lots of female lighting designers out there. So we were heartened by the fact that we had lots of women coming to Tea O'clock, we got the industry to sponsor us and we are moving on. And collaboration is definitely the way forward.

JULIA PASCAL

Thank you to the three incredibly inspirational speakers.

ACTIVISM

Bidisha talks with Rachel Millward, Esme Peach and Sarah Maple about their own personal and professional activism in bringing the issue of gender equality to the attention of the artistic and cultural community.

Rachel Millward co-founded Birds Eye View as a touring short film event in 2002, motivated by the statistic that only 7% of filmmakers are women. Rachel has written for the *New Statesman*, the *Financial Times Magazine* and the *Guardian* on women in film. Rachel was nominated a "world changing woman" by the *Guardian* in August 2006.

Esme Peach is a project manager of International Women's Day, a festival observed annually on 8 March, where thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate their achievements.

Sarah Maple is an award-winning contemporary artist. Blurring the lines between popular culture and religious devotion in an unfailingly mischievous manner, her aesthetic narrative urges the viewer to challenge traditional notions of religion, identity and the societal role of women. Her most recent auction, at The Aubin Gallery, raised funds for Feminism in London.

SUE PARRISH

Now we are going to have a panel which I, at one point, called *News from the Underground* but I was taken to task over it because, of course, all these women on this next panel are actually very established. It is just from my great age, young women look like fresh young shoots, but actually they have been, particularly the people at Birds Eye View, around for the last six or seven years.

Please, if you have any questions of that last panel, please keep them and Julia will do a round up at the end where if your proposals, if perhaps you have got proposals, or a proposition for collaborations or further meetings, it would be very good to receive them then. And as I say, all this will go into a document which will then be available and circulated.

BIDISHA

Hi everyone, this is the last panel discussion of the day. Thank you so much for sticking with us. Let me introduce the people I am joined by. This is Rachel Millward, one of the co-founders of the Birds Eye View film festival which began as an event of short films by women but it has actually blossomed into an international project which showcases and celebrates women directors. It was prompted by the realisation that 7% of directors are women and questions around why that number is so low. I'm joined also by Esme Peach from International Women's Day which is in March, and is celebrated internationally through events, dialogue, debates and celebrations pertaining to everything that affects women whether we are talking about things like women and the arts or extremely current and devastating issues such as forcing arranged marriage, or something we spoke about right at the top of today which is the persecution of women who are lesbians. And finally, but not least at all, the artist and activist Sarah Maple who works around issues of identity, gender and religion, but her work is also full of humour and has been so provocative that it has received death threats.

So this is what we are discussing today. Something which has been said throughout the day is that when we get together in a room I truly believe we can move mountains; and that although it doesn't feel that we can make a difference because you realise these things by yourself in isolation, all it takes is for you to talk to a girlfriend to realise that we really all feel the same way and that when you act on it, it does make a difference. So if I begin with you Rachel, Cannes was famous this year for featuring absolutely no women directors in its official selection and next year it will be

featuring two women directors. I'm guessing this is something which has fed into the direction and the development of the Birds Eye View.

RACHEL MILLWARD

Yes. I was 25 when I started Birds Eye View. I was making short films with a friend and we had an opportunity to premiere one of our short films at the Curzon in Soho: we literally hired the space for an hour. We were both really motivated by the fact that there were so few women role models for us really, as filmmakers. So we decided to create an event, make it a platform for our peers. We had this idea that we could be showcasing the work of other emerging women filmmakers as well. So we gathered a programme together of short films, directed by other emerging women, we called it *Birds Eye View* and then we marketed it and got in touch with different industry people. We weren't connected to anybody in the film industry at all; we just made our way with what we were doing. And it was exactly as you said, everyone responded because they were feeling the same as us and the Film Council came, and it was a sell-out, that first event. It was hugely exciting for us.

I guess at that point I realised, I sort of had the vision really, for what Birds Eye View could become: Which is now an international film festival. It is about 8 days, about 80 events, it's at the BFI South Bank and the ICA. We show films, all directed by women and we also make sure we are showing a huge range of work. So we have silent films, celebrating the role of women in early cinema to acknowledge and honour the history of women in cinema. The first person to ever make a narrative film was a woman: Alice Guy Blache, so we celebrate right from the beginning. We commission female artists as well, musicians to make live scores for those early silent films – so that we are doing something innovative, vibrant, new. We try to keep everything as forward-looking as we can. We have an innovation strand; we have screenwriting workshops, for games as well. And we are showcasing the best films by women from around the world. We do that because we believe in the power of images. And certainly, it just seems to be ridiculous that over 90% of the films we see on screen are directed by men. We want to make sure that the stories that are permeating our culture come from a female perspective as well as a male perspective. And we want that balance.

BIDISHA

Why do you think it is that there are so few women making films? Of course, this is almost unique in the sense that there is so much money involved, but the director Julie Delphy gave a now famous quote in which she said that when she was trying to get funding for her film *Two Days In Paris* which is a lovely and wonderful, very funny, film she would send the same proposal, one with a guy's name on it, and one with her own name on it, and they would ignore her own name, and when they thought it was a man (we are talking about studios in Hollywood here), they would call "him" in for a meeting. And they would be like "oh guy, join the club". For exactly the same proposal for the same film. Does that surprise you?

RACHEL MILLWARD

Well that still shocks doesn't it? You can't not be shocked by that. There are so many reasons and factors about why women aren't directing movies: I mean, it is obvious that the child-rearing issue is huge. The lifestyle issue of being a director and how you make that compatible with child-rearing, which is still mainly woman's work, is massive. There's definitely still a boy's club. There's definitely still a reluctance from, not all – and I think that the Film Council have been amazing actually at supporting women directors which is why I'm sad that they are going – from more commercial commissioners, to invest in female talent and there's the sort of general story that if a woman does make a film, and it gets the funding, and it doesn't completely massively succeed then she'll never get a second one made. Whereas a lot of films do bomb and directors do go on to have great careers.

BIDISHA

I have to bring in other people here. Sarah Maple, we've been speaking interestingly enough about how when you are a woman artist you are given one chance to make it and you have to make it big. Given that your work is socially aware, politically active, whatever you want to call it, how conscious are you of how possible it is to challenge the status quo as an artist?

SARAH MAPLE

Well I think I am in quite a unique position being my age and having the success that I have had. I really wanted to get back to you on what you were saying about how if you put a man's name on a script it's going to get seen. And I always used to wish, you know, that if I was a man it would be so much easier because it feels like you have to try doubly hard.

BIDISHA

You have to do the classic thing of working four times as hard for a quarter of the respect.

SARAH MAPLE

Yes, exactly. And I think that it is the same in all professions. My sister is a surgeon and she says that she feels that she has to do double, triple the work of men. She feels that it is a very male dominated environment, the male doctors commenting on the fit female surgeons and she feels like the hotter girls are given more chance than the other girls which is crazy.

I think that with my work I want to try to bring people's attention to this inequality. Because I don't think that people realise it is going on, or acknowledge it. People say things like, "I'm not a feminist. Feminism is done". But what I try to do with my work initially, and now through twitter and my blog and things like that, is just try and point things out that people wouldn't even notice. For example, everyone's got hotmail, if you go on hotmail, the advert for the MYA – make yourself amazing, the cosmetic surgery company – comes up every time I go into my hotmail and so on my blog I wrote about that and a young girl got back to me saying, "I never noticed it, but it was always there". And that's what I like to do with my work. It is sort of consciousness-raising. So with the auction I did a couple of weeks ago with Feminism in London, I thought what was most interesting

about putting this auction together was that people did not want to be associated with it at all. We couldn't get anyone to sponsor the event. The only reason that I had the actual place where we put on the auction was that my friend owned it and even then there were women on the board of this gallery and they said, "should we really be doing this event? It's not in our brand."

BIDISHA

Because it was associated with feminism?

SARAH MAPLE

Well yes, and they are a very trendy gallery. And he said, "well the fact that you are a young woman saying this shows that we do have to put on this event." I just thought it was very interesting.

BIDISHA

Esme Peach, you are involved with International Women's Day. Do you think that part of the problem is that, exactly what Sarah has just been saying, as soon as women come together it sort of excites the angst of everyone around it so that whenever something like International Women's Day is on it comes under such close scrutiny that you have to answer every front. Which is: is it going to be a feminist event? What is the purpose of it? Why are you doing it? Can you answer every single facet of women's lives in one day?

ESME PEACH

That's an interesting question. I think that one way to look at it is how International Women's Day is celebrated, or rather *not* celebrated, in the UK. It is very different from what happens in other countries. My family is from Turkey – I am often in Turkey for International Women's Day because it is around my Mum's birthday – every woman in Turkey pretty much knows that it is International Women's Day. And you can't escape it – it is in the streets, it is in the restaurants, it is at high profile dinners, it is part of the zeitgeist. And that's the same for a lot of other countries. It is a bank holiday in fifteen countries; in China people get the day off work for International Women's Day but in the UK it does slip underneath the radar or it tends to be something that is confined to the charity sector, or the feminist movement. It doesn't necessarily penetrate popular culture in that way. And in terms of the arts I think that Birds Eye View is really one of the only mainstream arts festivals that happens during the International Women's Day week so I think in the UK it is a particular challenge. In the UK it is particularly attacked: is this really needed now? Is it still relevant? Well we would argue that it is absolutely still relevant because we live in a global society where, 19% of the world's parliamentarians are women, where one in three women will experience violence, where 70% of the world's poor are women and where only 24% of the people we will hear or see in the media, the mainstream media, will be women. So absolutely there is still relevance for International Women's Day.

BIDISHA

I'm going to come back to Rachel in a second, but do you think that in Britain in particular, there is a kind of false assumption that the battles have been won because technically the legislation for equality is in place even though we don't necessarily have power to enforce it. And, as we heard from the previous speaker, when a woman, particularly an isolated woman, stands up and tries to enforce it, what happens is that she is punished by the institution.

ESME PEACH

Yes, definitely. I think that particularly amongst the younger generation, there is the idea that gender equality has been done and dusted and we are in an equal world. But certainly, working on the IWD's project and speaking to women in their 20s and 30s there is that thing that someone was saying earlier of, you know, this thing happened to me – only a small thing – and when you start to collect all those small narratives you have a huge picture of gender inequality and discrimination that still exists. So I think that it's about bringing people together to aggregate that story. Certainly what we are trying to do with IWD and the coalition of charities involved, which is being lead by Annie Lennox, is to really reinvigorate the call for gender equality and ask the world to go 50/50 in all sectors, from politics to the arts. And I think it's really important that we do pass the baton to the younger generation, and make feminism relevant to them, and make it a word that people are proud to say again.

BIDISHA

Yes. Rachel, how do you want the Birds Eye View's brand to develop? What would be excellent is if it were to become a resource for women directors to access money, distribution, because it is not always that making a film is a problem. Often it is, how you distribute it, where do you show it, how to get people to find out about it? I'm assuming that you want it to grow so that it is a force.

RACHEL MILLWARD

I'd like it to grow of course. We are running these labs for women writers in response to thinking about getting more films made by women. In some ways it's more surprising, I think, that there are so few women writers in film, than it is directors, because you'd have thought that you could write more flexibly. You'd have thought that that was more balanced but it isn't. So what we've been doing is hot-housing emerging talent and working with them to develop stories, put them on intensive training residentials and then pairing them with a production company. So at the moment we are working with animators and writers, sort of feature animations which they can hopefully get made. I would love to see the lab side of what we do develop a lot more so that we are actually being a gateway into the film industry for young women. But particularly to actually see more feature films that go international, and are big, made by women on our screens and I think it is around that that I am excited.

I suppose through the festival there is a chance for women of all generations to be really inspired and encouraged and uplifted by the work that you can see. Because it is a chance to come and to sit at the feet of great directors and go "oh I could do that" and "you look like me. I could do that" which is a basic thing that I think we all do.

BIDISHA

Absolutely and there's nothing wrong with that. We talk about the boys club as though that's a bad thing but actually – what is a club? It is a group of like minded individuals who are creating together.

RACHEL MILLWARD

Yes. Though I suppose I see Birds Eye View as beginning to be public facing. My dream for it if we were to find a commercial partner and it were to go bigger is that it reach a bigger public audience, so that the public understand– it's that thing about pointing out facts – that what we see on film and TV permeates culture so thoroughly, and that it is so biased. There is this brilliant test: the Bechtel test.

BIDISHA

The Bechtel Test. Does everyone know what this is? It was done by a film critic and it is how to tell if a film even begins to get towards being not sexist. So, The Bechtel Test: In the film are there two characters who are women, who have names, who talk to each other about something which is not a man, or something to do with being a wife or being a mum? And what is so shocking is that that sounds so very simple. There are incredibly few films which feature two women with names, with jobs, talking to each other about something which is not about how much they love a man and want to serve him lamb chops essentially.

I want to end by coming to Sarah because you brought up something which I think is very important which is about the role of the media in all this. For a long time the media has maintained that they aren't covering women artists because women artists aren't out there, now anyone involved in the industry knows that is simply not true. What's happening is that even if an industry is not that sexist, I think the media can be in terms of the number of women who are represented. So you talk about the success you have. I second that, I have had success in my career as an individual. But whenever I, or anyone else, has been covered I have noticed that on a double page spread I am the only woman and I never wanted to be part of a scenario where I am forced into unnatural competition with women against whom one feels no natural competition whatsoever. Do you think that part of the problem here is that even though there is tremendous activism going on, it still needs to filter through into the mainstream media so that this is normalised?

SARAH MAPLE

Yes I think that all the legislation and everything that comes is great, but I think attitudes need to change as well. And that is a lot harder to do and that is what I try to aim for in my work. Just doing little things, for example: if someone makes a rape joke, saying "that's not funny" – things like that make a difference.

BIDISHA

Yes. Challenging sexism when it happens.

SARAH MAPLE

Yes; in your everyday life.

RACHEL MILLWARD

And what I think is really important, and what we do at Birds Eye View, is to focus on the celebration as well. I think that however completely valid a point is, when you come up with a negative a lot of people can find that hugely difficult to take on and sometimes, through

celebrating the thing that is rare, it gets people excited to see more of it and that's what we are trying to do. I sometimes see Birds Eye View as a little oasis in the world of film; women have the creative vision, here. And it shouldn't be just here. But it is here, so let's celebrate it, let's love it, and hope it spreads further. So I'm totally with you on that but I think it is a slightly different approach. I don't know if you can call what we do activism but if it is then it is a different sort.

BIDISHA

It definitely is. It is positive activism, of course it is. It's cultural activism. Esme, Rachel's spoken about the importance of the celebration. How do you make the balance as someone who is also an activist between pointing out all the inequality and persecution that still exists and actually highlighting the many women and men out there who are trying to change that?

ESME PEACH

I think you can absolutely do both and I think International Women's Day tries to do both. Certainly the project we are planning in 2011, which is the 100th anniversary, will be about looking back, looking at the gains that have been made, celebrating the triumphs, taking stock of where we are and then also looking at what needs to be done for the future. And it will be about the politics of change, but it will also be about culture, celebration and the fantastic things that people have done. I am here today to invite you all as cultural practitioners to be part of International Women's Day. It needs to be an alliance; it can't just be something that is run by our charity coalition because it will be very dull and very grey. Rather it needs to be something that becomes part of popular culture and we are looking at whether it is possible to have an arts and media takeover that week. Where for one week, we redress the balance, where we have programming by women for women. So, for example, last year Sky News did an all female line up for one day.

BIDISHA

And why is it that that feels radical?

ESME PEACH

What's really interesting is that their ratings went up. Now that's very important. So I'm thinking for IWD if we have amazing cultural programming for women by women which is successful which crams the halls and people are excited about, can we then show that there is a demand for that for the future? So it doesn't become a tokenistic, "oh for one day we had all women playwrights," but instead becomes something about which people say, "oh actually this sells. This has appeal."

BIDISHA

This is what is so heartening but so devastating: whenever one woman opens the door a little bit, two million women who have been waiting, waiting, waiting burst through it saying "thank you for opening the door just a tiny bit" but we have to keep those doors open and change the fabric of it. On that note I have to end but we do have time for questions. Thank you all for coming and being so patient and for your excellent comments, but we want more comments from you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

I just wanted to say thank you so much to Sphinx and speakers for an absolutely inspiring, inspiring day. There is a real sense that we need to make alliances and we need to network and to relate to

that. My theatre company *Velvet Ensemble* has a very similar mission statement to Sphinx which is to put the female voice and experience centre stage.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2

I'm an actress and what I wanted to do really was share my experience over the last year because I was at the conference at the National last year, and I was inspired then, as I am today. Earlier it was said that there is a struggle in terms of women, but also in terms of age and in terms of class as well and I wanted to add the ethnicity issue as well. It is inspiring to see that there is representation on the stage today. I am from an ethnic background myself and last year I spoke with Oona King. She was the head of diversity at Channel 4 and she was asking if anyone had any ideas for programmes about women of an ethnic background and also stories for women of a certain age as well. Myself and another friend had already created a project and we were hugely inspired and I managed to get a meeting with Oona. But when I got to the meeting, what had happened since was, the cuts, and the channel had decided that they weren't going to put any money into new programmes but they would try to shoe-horn some older and ethnic characters into existing programmes.

BIDISHA

That's called "the ethnic walk-on".

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2

So I was a bit confused because I'd come with my pack, all ready, and it was sort of null and void at that time. But it has been hugely inspiring, and the thing to take away from this is to get together and discuss and share experiences and support each other because there is a hell of a lot of talent and intelligence here. But I also wonder about, as well as finding our own niche and being very successful, I wonder how we can work with the cuts and the status quo of the capitalist framework that we are living in, in order to make it work for us. I see four women that have done that, so I wonder.

BIDISHA

It's a good question. Firstly, well done on that opportunity and don't let it go. If it doesn't work with TV or film then get in touch with theatres and turn your proposal into some work, don't put it into a drawer. So don't let go of that project.

It's always very difficult to work in an institution. I saw Germaine Greer talking at a conference for the BBC on what to do about women. And it was full of these institutionalised women who were very Stepford. Something happens when you work for the BBC, you sort of go, "sexism, oo me no, what?" Because you are overworked. It's very difficult because she said, and I agree, that "the institution changes the woman before the woman can change the institution." Because of course the institution is bigger than you and there is that very basic thing about you have a mortgage to pay, you have children and dependents to look after and sometimes you don't have the energy and you genuinely don't have the power to fight on behalf of all women because you are literally doing a day job. And no one should ever blame other women for this because women are doing what women have done for centuries, which is: doing the best we can with what we have got. And so what happens is that you work for the corporation by day and fight it by night. You are like Catwoman: You are the secret vigilante getting in touch with other secret women superheroes to try and find the way. It's just difficult, you do what you can, and I don't know the answer. I left

Night Waves because I couldn't make a change and I couldn't live with myself, hosting this show where guys would come on all the time. 50% of the guys were excellent and 50% were not and would have been replaced easily by excellent women and then we would all have been excellent together, equally.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3

I run a theatre company called Actors of Dionysus and I am an actor/director and recently retrained as an aerialist. We are doing a one woman show inspired by The Bacchae and Lysistrata which has more women in it than men. I have to say that I am guilty of this collusion because we currently have no women on our board of directors. So I couldn't really miss this opportunity of having so many women without advertising that we are looking for trustees and wondering if there was a group that actually encourages women trustees on boards.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 4

This is in response to something Rachel said about her show selling out and what Jean was saying about Mamma Mia and statistics and the cuts. I work a lot as a voiceover artist for television because my voice sells to women and in a time of cuts, surely, a good argument, outside of everything that we're saying is money. Women watch television, women go to the theatre, and there must be a really strong economic argument - If you look, for example, at adverts, or voiceovers, promos for television - certainly in the commercial sector, they know that women selling to women sells.

RACHEL MILLWARD

I totally agree with this. I think it is a little bit like the point about trying to staple us to the celebratory side of things, but we need to couple that with fact. But if it can be positive facts that will just get us further so much faster. I really agree with that. Mamma Mia did ridiculously well, and even Sex and the City – what's hilarious is that the top Hollywood dude was just shocked. A film that just stars women opens successfully? Shock?! Shock that something that was hugely successful as a TV series did well?! How is that a shock? That's how much people think you need a male lead to open a film, it is deeply ingrained in the industry and it is a false belief. That's not about being a feminist. That's about being real and looking at facts and commercial opportunity. And certainly, I think it is really important that we highlight the successes all the time, I agree with that.

BIDISHA

We have space for one more question. Make it good.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 6

It's not a question actually. It's about solidarity. If you haven't signed the equity petition for equal representation of women in film and television drama then please do so now. And just for the record, I did join an all girl pop band.

BIDISHA

On that note thank you for everyone who has come today – it has been amazing. Thank you to Sue Parrish, everyone at Sphinx Theatre, Equity, sign the petition online. Rachel Millward, Sarah Maple, Esme Peach, I was Bidisha, thank you very much for coming.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Julia Pascal summarises the key points of the day's discussions and asks the audience to join the campaigns and move forward.

JULIA PASCAL

Just a very fast wind up: Those of you who are equity members, we are asking you to support the Equity equality campaign, so eloquently discussed today. We want you to pressure your own professional organisations to join and support the campaign. Be there, contact them. Pressure the Equity council to support the campaign within Equity by providing increased resources for the equality office which is currently multi-tasking across tax and insurance issues.

Set up a campaign committee through the professional organisations to develop a gender equality pledge through funding bodies, media training and professional theatres and organisations

Apart from signing up to networks and supporting each others' work we need to campaign at these political levels. It's clear from the ACE's first annual equality report and from the stimulating meeting last week held by Equity's women's committee that gender is low on the list of priorities. The report, 28 pages, consists of 7 pages on race equality, 5 pages on disability equality and just fewer than 2 on gender. We are very low on the list.

There's an interesting section on the Cultural Olympiad which sets out what could be a useful blueprint for gender equality progress. In particular, the £1.5 million commissioning fund for disabled artists. If £1.5 million is available for disabled artists, why not the same for women?

So to wind up again: I want you to contact the organisations mentioned. I want you to take today home and not forget about it. To make networks. To exchange emails with the people you have talked with today. To contact. I was very inspired by the young activists at the end, I can see the lines through the generations. Things are happening. I think that today we made a great thing happen. And I want to say thank you to Sue because I realise now that we are all members of the all girl band.

APPENDIX: PRESS ACTIVITY

Women directors 'also face discrimination'

Published Wednesday 3 November 2010 by Matthew Hemley for *The Stage*

Shirley Valentine director Glen Walford has claimed that the lack of equal opportunities for women in the arts is not confined to older actresses, saying women are often overlooked when it comes to artistic director roles.

Walford, who was at the helm of the recent West End revival of Shirley Valentine starring Meera Syal, was speaking at a conference hosted by feminist theatre company Sphinx that focused on gender equality in the arts.

The former artistic director of the Liverpool Everyman, where she commissioned and directed the world premiere of Russell's play, revealed that she had herself experienced sexism when applying for an artistic director role in the seventies. She claimed women still faced similar issues today. "I am sure it still exists. It is true that if a man and woman are up for running a theatre, it's quite likely that the man will get it," she said.

Sphinx's conference gave a platform to a number of artists, in both performance and backstage roles, and was designed to develop strategies to combat inequality. It featured contributions from screenwriter Guy Hibbert as well as performers Ann Mitchell and Maggie Steed.

Hibbert said writers should do more to "consciously" create parts for women, particularly those over the age of 40, while Mitchell urged actresses not to take roles that undermine women and their talents.

Referring to an interview in which Juliet Stevenson claimed most actresses' parts involve "carrying trays and putting lamb chops down in front of the leading man", Mitchell said: "I am often broke but I will never do the lamb chop thing. I couldn't actually do it. It's a physical impossibility."

Meanwhile, at the event, Equity vice president Jean Rogers said artistic directors could do more to stage productions featuring women.

"All artistic directors have a choice. There are casts that have equal men and women roles. We have to make them aware that choice is important," she said. Rogers was speaking on a panel with Women in Film and Television chief executive Kate Kinninmont, who raised concerns that the problem regarding roles for women on television affected entertainment series as well as drama.

She pointed to Bruce Forsyth's role as the host of Strictly Come Dancing, alongside Tess Daly. "When did you ever see an 80-year-old woman with a toy boy on an entertainment show?" she asked.

At the conference, women were urged to form "alliances" and to put pressure on public bodies to show how they are implementing the Gender Equality Duty, which was introduced in 2007 and states that public bodies must promote equality of opportunity between men and women.