STAMP DAY 3

**Adapt, Explore, Create: What is the role of digital in theatre's future?**

Curated & chaired by Amy Clare Tasker from The Cockpit Theatre

Speakers: Kevin Jamieson, Head of Programming for HOME Manchester

Javaad Alipoor, artist, activist and writer

Paula Varjack, theatre-maker and video-artist

Tom Mansfield, Artistic Director of Upstart Theatre

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Okay Hello everyone, my name is Nick, and I'm the head of theater at the Pleasance, and welcome to stamp connects. For those who've joined us for any of the previous three days, but for the benefit of those who are joining us for the first time stamp is a network of over 50 organizations who work together to take practical collective action to improve the ways in which artists are supported by organizations and valued more widely in society session today is going to be BSL interpreted by Lynn and Rachel and Lynne, will be BSL interpreting. First, I'm just going to spotlight Lynn. For anyone that's using the interpretation to be able to find Lynn, we will change interpreters about every 15 minutes and will slightly pause at that point, so I can spotlight the new interpreter, as they're changing over

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the stack connects online is the biggest event we run every year, so normally held in person at Shoreditch Town Hall. This is the first time that we've hosted the event online, and thank you for joining our final panel discussion of what feels a little bit like a three day marathon so thank you to everyone that's been to multiple sessions and if it's your first time welcome the sessions today are also being captioned by otter AI, so to Activate, Activate the closed captions, please click the closed captions button at the bottom of your screen, or you can find it by clicking the three dots at the top of your screen if you're on a mobile. You can then click View closed captions. They'll also be a full transcript of the event by clicking on the top left hand corner and this should open a new window, which includes the transcript. Please, we're going to try and use the chat function to pose questions during the session chair will ask for these questions will be if you've asked your questions in the chat, or if you let me know if you'd like to directly address the panel with a question, and I'll have a bit of a running order so we can make sure we get through as many questions as possible in the shortest amount of time. If you have any trouble with tech or Zoom during the session. I'm here to help out so just drop me a direct message in the chat and I'll be able to help you. That's it for me so I'm going to hand over to Amy to begin the panel.

26:35

Hello, everyone. Thanks Nick. My name is Amy Claire Tasker, I'm a theatre maker and creative producer. I work with the cockpit in Marleybone in London on their theater maker, artists development program. And while our Europe Theatre Festival, and I've been doing a bit of experimenting myself with digital tools for theater. And really, really looking forward to this conversation with some fellow artists and programmers who are who are really pioneering new forms in this crazy time and even indeed before this crazy time. So I want to give us a little bit of a conceptual introduction here before we hear from our panelists. So I'll talk for just a few minutes, then I'll ask them all to introduce themselves, then we'll have a discussion, kind of based on those ideas that come up in the introductions, and at the end for the last 15 minutes or so we will have a q&a with all of you who have joined us today, and Nick is going to collect your questions, so that we can address them at the end of the session. Brilliant. Thank you all so much for joining us and thanks to our panelists and our interpreters for making this happen. All right, so I'll just give dive in to a little bit about what we are talking about when we're saying, digital tools for theater. And there have been a number of really interesting formats that have emerged in the last year, for example, we've had live online interactive performances where audiences and performers are in the same digital space, like zoom Twitch, gather and wonder and things like that. And we've had live stream performances like National Theatre Live, that have actually that's not what I mean, that's pre recorded and streamed at a specific time. Live Stream performances, and what I mean when I say that is that the performance is happening at the same time that it's being streamed out online. We've seen on demand performances, There's this new, you know, for example vault festival or bolt, bolt TV that has got a pretty robust. On Demand offer. We've seen multi device experiences so that might be live performances with the audience online in zoom or watching on YouTube and on WhatsApp or Instagram on their phones. We've got stories that unfold via text message or email over several days, that can be kind of durational and, you know five minute pre recorded bits that or text bits that come to you. Over the course of a week or so. And we've also seen audio projects that kind of pair with a specific physical experience like, you know, a podcast or a story that you listen to while you're walking around your neighborhood. So, those are lots of ways that digital performance can manifest, and I'm sure there are more and I'm looking forward to hearing from our panelists if they've, if they think I've missed anything. But what I think is really interesting is that these technologies are not new, and artists have been using them in the before times before we will force if you'd like online. What is new is the audiences and venues during the pandemic have been more willing to engage with these digital tools. In the absence of in person, theater, and I believe that when venues, reopen. We won't return to how things were. I hope we won't, because we've discovered too much creative potential and too many benefits to go back, you know to completely abandon all of these, these really interesting, creative formats. Some of the great benefits that we've discovered are that audit or audit, excuse me, artists can collaborate across borders, across time zones, even just across different distances within the same region and audiences can join in from anywhere in the world, and I've been in performances with people from Russia and the US and South America, all at the same time and it's really, I think that's pretty groundbreaking to be able to create a shared cultural experience that that goes beyond the physical here and now and people in the same area.

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And we've also seen that digital performances can increase access for people who find it difficult to get to a physical venue, so there's really good reasons to keep working with these digital tools, as we as we open our venues again. And I'm also really intrigued by what creative possibilities will emerge when we can have audiences in the venue, and online in one show how would you have two audiences in different spaces. Being part of the same experience, what would that look like, what would it look like if some of the performers were on stage and some of the performers were online, how would they interact with each other. So I'm really keen to see how theatre makers, explore this in the next few years. Right, that's my introduction, I'd now like to introduce each panelist, or rather, invite them to introduce themselves and to share with us what they, what they've been doing with digital theater and what they've been thinking about what they, what's their kind of question or provocation, related to our topic today. So I'll start with Kevin. Thanks, Kevin. Hi,

32:35

thanks, thanks for that. Hello everyone, I'm Kevin Jameson I'm the head of program home in Manchester, we're a multi art form venue that has two theater spaces five cinemas, and two galleries, amongst many other things, and I'll try and be as concise as I can with what we've kind of been up to through through the last 12 months I think when locked down first. In the first appeared. We initially thought we will bring out some archived recordings of previous work that we've done. And we'll put that out as kind of some content, I mean obviously that was also a time when we thought, you know the lockdown would be three weeks, and everything will be alright kind of after that, near we are 12 months later, but that was our initial reaction, and we started to look into that, but we also kind of figured that that then recordings weren't really made for broadcast so was that really fair to the artist to put out something that wasn't sort of broadcast a bowl or not really meant for that, and that didn't really seem fair so we quickly kind of changed our thinking around that. And also realizing and sensing the kind of impact for artists that the lockdown would have. And so we came up with a strand of work that we called homemakers, where we engaged a selection of artists who were obviously kind of at home, to engage with audiences who were also home, and they kind of, there was short Commission's given to each artist, which kind of equated to a roughly around two weeks work so we knew it was going to kind of be a short sharp kind of response piece took to where they are. With the idea being that they were made within each artists house or you know with their collaborators, virtually, and then to be put out in whatever way we started with an initial cohort of about eight to 10 in our initial batch and we, we went to some of the artists that we've worked with before, home, and you were Manchester baseball so kind of UK based. We, we did them, and that was that was a really great start but we knew that kind of the budget for continuing that was, was going to be stunted in terms of we didn't have a kind of unlimited budget for that. So what we then started to do was talk to other venues around the country to work with them as CO commissioning partners on it, to kind of come on board with the same terms with the same kind of ethos that we were going into with to just expand that reach and expand the network of them. So, I mean currently today we have done over 40 commissions as part of the homemakers projects, and we've got another 12 They're about to go live, kind of over the next four to six weeks. As we can continue through this, we'd initially kind of set it up I think we launched in, the first one around April last year, we thought we'd just run till Christmas. We've since extended it obviously as the lockdowns have extended, and it seems sort of a trite thing but I've kind of just been constantly surprised by the creativity of the artists like that's not to say that I thought the artists were not going to be creative through this process. I think it's how, what, how, above and beyond, they have gone with that, I think, you know, we have to have lots of video and audio work through through the project. We've also kind of done a live 12 hour durational performance via zoom, and there's been instructions for a game which you download and play kind of offline. We've done online games. We did a brilliant project called the poetry health service where you can log on and depending on how you're feeling through an algorithm you get some prescribed a poem to suit the mood of your day, a much, much, much more. I just think how people were kind of really an art to exploring that was, was amazing, and it was also interesting for us I think in the terms of digital for us started to mean not live likes it could be anything. So it's not necessarily that it's online, even though you know sit down became kind of a weird, change of the wording I think from our end that digital was, was not live so, and with the Commission's as well we've worked with UK artists and international artists that have had international collaborations through that, and ultimately, the ticketing was all done on Pay what you decide, and, you know, as part of a portion of that box office return, went to the artists, and halfway into the venues that were supporting that as well so it was a kind of way of also having sort of more money for the artists at a time when they were struggling to to earn anything. And so that, that was our you know without going too far, far into that was our homemakers project. And the other thing that we did do as well we did reopen the venue in October, and we're full of full of hope for that and then obviously another lockdown descended so we did. Then also quickly pivot to doing live streaming as well through that period of time. So all the planned live program that we had to move to a live stream which also kind of enabled to to the companies which one was shipped there to, and one was David Hoyle, which had quite a bit of interactivity with it to really rethink how that would work. So, David did a live eBay auction. That was interactive. As part of the show, and ship there too, we did, there was a WhatsApp group that kind of was there, running alongside it. Part of that was key to the show but also it started to generate, almost like a kind of, you know, live chat along for audiences, you know, as, as well through that so. So that's the kind of mix of work that we've been doing in Manchester guess over the past 12 months without going too deeper into that. And I guess, you know, our kind of, you know,

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Talk,

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what's the word provocation, whatever, whatever the term Sorry, I forgot what the terminology was, I guess, from our point of view that we're really wrestling with is I guess it does now feel the genies out the bottle with digital and at venues for so long, have been kind of thinking around digital but not really, you know, done too much with that, I think now it's, it's really a proven thing, and I think you're what you said earlier Amy's right, you will not disappear once venues reopen. So I guess, you know, from our point of view, we're wrestling with how do venues really support artists through that, as in, you know, from both elements so if people are wanting to you know just make digital work that the programming side of that is at hybrid approach, the development of that as well. We also were you know around things like digital poverty for audiences as well so that you know and artists, you know you need kit to make stuff right so you know, all that sort of stuff so we're already starting to think of, you know, artist development kind of opportunities where it's just money to buy kit for example you know that sort of stuff as well as kind of the usual stuff so there's a lot in that but that's kind of where where I'm in terms of wrestling with Asperger's.

39:29

Thanks so much for that Kevin. Before we go to Paulo we'll swap BSL interpreters, So we'll just pause a moment while that happens. Looks like Rachel's ready super Thanks, Paula, go ahead.

39:48

Hi, my name is Paula. I'm an artist working in video performance and participation. I've primarily been a solo maker but increasingly over the last few years I've been making more collaborative work. And I'm through that one half of a company called varjak Lowery with my collaborator Chuck blue Lowery. And I think as someone who's an interdisciplinary maker who sometimes feels like I've literally had lots of different lives through these art forms I originally trained as a stage manager. I then went into training into filmmaking I worked in the animation industry for many years where I looked at over, audio Production and Sound Design, then got into kind of underground cabaret performance and spoken word and ended up as an interdisciplinary theatre maker. So in a weird way, as difficult as last year has been, it's kind of been very well suited to the experiences I've had, before this period, also as someone who is biracial bisexual and binational used to being in between and blurring of spaces and I suppose what I've discovered more than anything is that I always had to digital practice even though I didn't call it that, I was a blogger before I wrote monologues. I was doing remote collaborations with even this makes me feel ancient with producers on my space, in different parts of the world I really missed that actually I'm trying to find a way to bring that back, and then as soon as I started making theater work, I was always trying to figure out how to bring my film practice into it. And as I started doing shows I was really interested in how to use social media to extend the work so it would be about scratching work effectively by sharing images on my social media, while I was in rehearsal rooms, or if I had interview material that was within the show. I would also have video series on Vimeo and was always within understanding that it might be an additional offer for people who come and see the work in the theatrical space, but it might mean, it reaches a completely different audience and that's okay too. I think in the last year however when I haven't been able to make work in physical spaces and I'm always very specific about saying physical spaces rather than live or digital because I personally find these two words really unhelpful and how broad, they are has been the challenges I've been posed in doing my participation educational work, which more than anything is where I found the greatest innovation in the sector in the last year because rather than just having shows cancelled from one week to the next, I had to figure out how to deliver sessions on zoom that I never had before two young participants I was working with or I had to figure out how to teach devising to my students at Guildhall, without ever having done that before and it's being pushed through, through those changes that I think is put my work in an even more exciting place. And I guess where I'm at now is really thinking about creating work for devices. So thinking about devices in a kind of site specific way, and also kind of challenging what this word hybrid means, which I also find bizarre is a new term when we've got years of people watching rally shows for example while voting on their phones and, or, or tweeting along to programs like that none of this is new. It's new to theater but it's been happening within television and film and online for a while and I'm interested in taking on all of that. But I guess, in terms of where we're headed, I sorta, I kind of have the same provocation than a positive and cynical spin, this is a positive spin would be having learned all these different ways to develop or how some of us have, what does the future of hybrid look like now that we know what is possible. And then the cynical side of me, especially being in rooms of people who are not enthusiastic about any of this stuff is how transformative has this period been really, because I also feel like I've been on a lot of rooms that people are like, that was great, we're done, we never want to deal with it ever again, we didn't see any online work, we hate zoom, we don't know what other platforms are, and those people just want to see this all done, and I and as much as I'm very enthusiastic and excited about the people in this space like I think the work that home has been programming has been really exciting. It was really great to see rich kids, both in frontiers at Sundance as well as having seen at Edinboro, I've worked with Tom in the past, I love how he's embracing the medium. I don't think Nick is that excited about digital but I think he's trying with me, I think it's great. I don't know what the conversation is gonna have in a year's time, I hope we can keep going but I guess we'll just see what happened.

44:14

Fantastic. Thanks, Paula, that's a really rich contribution there. Lovely. Divide Can you introduce yourself please.

44:22

Yeah no, definitely. My name is Giovanni PA, and I am primarily artistic director of a small producing company called the Divali car company, not necessarily the most imaginative title for a company that has ever come across, but you know it does what it says on the tin. We work a lot with home, you know we one of the associate companies I'm based in Manchester. And over the past couple of years before the pandemic I was making writings of being in and CO directing, some plays shows which were largely about the intersection of contemporary politics and contemporary theatre, one thing I should say is if I move around and wriggle around weirdly in my chair forgive it. I've completely flopped my upper back and neck in lockdown so Jeremy just just go with that. And, you know, the poor posture and the LGM and everything. In any case, it you know ignoring that, and I was, I was lucky in the sense that before lockdown I was already playing around with exactly what Paula talked about in terms of we were thinking about as double screening. So we were making work which was about the intersection of contemporary politics and contemporary technology and trying to complicate slightly you know there's that there's, I feel like there's two kinds of chat about contemporary tech one which is like a kind of breathless utopianism and the other which is a kind of grim anything that bad that happens in the world is because of Twitter and we were trying to just complicate that chat a bit, you know, so we made a show called the believers about brothers, which was largely about masculinity politics the internet violence and these things, and we made a show called Rich kids, history of shopping malls in Tehran, and the parlor mentioned, and so we were kind of lucky in the sense that we had this work which had like a digital component like what what people call double screening the way you watch a show on TV and you talk about it on Twitter, whatever. But as we went into lockdown and so we had this stuff that we were able to like kind of spin into stuff that would happen online but still be live. And when we opened the digital version of rich kids. I think we were lucky again that like, that was a few months into lockdown so actually we had, we'd had a little bit of everything going online, you know, I mean, and it was in the summer last year, and it just felt like what was really clear was people. There was a hunger for, you know something happening alpha seven you know other people doing at the same time, rather than watch it on YouTube whenever you like. So we just embrace that and that we were very lucky in that show farmers audiences and it's kind of it's growing around the world at the minute. And I think I would say two things provocation wise, very quickly. One is that, you know, actually. And again, it's great to speak after as part of such a great panel and in a way, be able to reiterate one of things that Paul was saying, which is this question of saying like, making work for devices and that kind of stuff one really interesting thing to point out is that actually you don't have to be super techie to do that like, and actually what we're doing when we're doing that is largely the same stick as like the living theater playing with microphones in 1963 or whatever, you know, I mean, and there's something liberating about that, that you don't need to be able to call you don't need to find like a tech bro to come and do the work for you, whatever you can just play around with stuff. The other thing that I hope we do learn from this and this is, you know, one of the things we're working on at the minute is a podcast about anti racist politics in the UK, the color of our politics coming to all good places where you download download podcasts on the eighth of April so please do listen, and, and one of the reasons we're doing that work is because actually certain Platt tech platforms are good at building certain kinds of audiences and as a sector more broadly in terms of cons in terms of marketing, marketing, we haven't started to do that work, yet we don't think about how stuff that sits at a slightly oblique angle to perhaps what we think of as the main part of our work, how we can actually like spin stuff off, which is native to that space and of course, the reason I give an example of a podcast is like literally the famous thing about podcasts is, they're good for building communities because you get to talk into someone's ear once a week for an hour, dude, I mean that's quite what you call it, you know, a very kind of close relationship to have with someone. So I think if I've got a provocation for people which is broader than what art you make, it's that, how do we, the internet is really good for making community, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worst, how do we, you know, I mean, get a little touch of that better.

49:11

Wonderful. Thanks to Tom, can you go ahead.

49:16

Thanks Amy. Hi everyone, I'm Tom, I'm the artistic director of upstarts theater, and we're small, ish, this company, working out of London. And I know our mission is to do what we call reimagine the world by making theater playable. So we're particularly interested in interactive and playable work we want to make theater for audiences who want to play which means giving them genuine and meaningful agency in what's happening in performance, and we kind of we came to that after some years starting off really very much as a new writing company, and doing plays by, you know, emerging writers at the earliest stages in their careers, evolved into devising work, and then sort of really brought together, my love of theory NES with my love of play and and gain. And part of that sits within the digital realm so you know things like video games, and part of that sits within life stuff so whether it's sport, or board games or the kind of drama games that you might play in a rehearsal room or in a workshop or wherever. And so we've kind of the pandemic hit us, really, as we were starting as a company to pivot towards this this this way of thinking, were putting putting play and playfulness and gain was at the heart of our work. So, in some ways, we were able to adapt, quite well and to, to everything that happened and to take more stuff into an online space than perhaps we would have done. I feel like I live for the lightness of theater, really, I've really, like, that's what I feel really deprived of over the last year when it comes to theater itself but we're so my big provocation for everybody, I'll talk briefly about some of the things that we've been doing with my company. In the last year but my big provocation, is how do we how do we take things into an online space or a digital space or whatever language we want to use to describe that space, a space that isn't the traditional live theater environment. And while retaining the sense of a shared event, and Rachel Briscoe who's one of the CO artistic directors of a company called fast familia, really brilliant, maker of playable theater, talks about the quality of event Enos, and that even if we're not in the same physical space, and even if we're not in the same time, we're still feeling like we're sharing part of the same experience and that if that's at the heart of what makes theater, theater, how can we retain that while using all of the amazing tools that are available to us within the digital realm. So some of the things that we've done in the last year. Well, we, for the last five years we've been running a thing called dare festival of which Paul has been apart before, which is a festival of new and emerging work and it normally happens in the ditch, which is the basement space shortage Town Hall in East London. And obviously that wasn't possible for this year's one, so we ran it as an online Festival, and so we use gather an amazing, I would highly recommend conferencing platform to create a front of house venue space, and then presented five shows live over digital conferencing platforms and one show, which was which which morphed over the time we were working with it into an installation that ran off, a video game system called Unity. And we've also this year finished a big four national project with partner companies in Macedonia, and Germany and Austria, all of which was supposed to be presenting live last month, and ended up being presented online as mostly as time streams, so you know it's 730 We're now streaming this thing over YouTube. And we also, we launched something into space, and made a film of it, and a video game of it, that was quite fun. And we made a podcast as well. So we've been, we've been taking some time this year to really experiment with, like, what are the different forms out there, that, that we can use. So yeah, I think there is totally a thing that we, we can all be talking about as makers, if this was almost about like how do these tools enable us to, to build on our existing practices, how do they let us expand, sometimes that involves as developer saying sometimes that involves using tech that we're already using. Sometimes it does involve learning code. And I think that the big thing that I've learned this year is that learning code isn't that difficult. It involves taking some time, but it's, it's not that tricky if you can write a budget for a show you can totally write code is easier actually to write code, and theatre is a 19th century medium, I think, and British theatre, by and large, and I probably won't include anyone in the Supreme Court, as this but I would say, by and large, British theatre is an incredibly 19th century medium right, we have a mode of production that basically evolved in the 1880s, you know, and that's like, Anton Chekhov writes a play, Stanislavski director, a bunch of people are in it, we rehearse, we perform it, rinse and repeat. And we have five and one thing that the pandemic has forced all of us to do in the sector is think like people who live in the 21st century when we're at work, because we all do that all the time at home, you know, like, I spend much more time watching Netflix than I have done watching digital theater, and last year and I'm sure that's true for many of the people who are here. Why, because they're better at it than we are. And I think this is an opportunity for us to as a sector, to really think about like how are the ways that we want to take our unique approaches to storytelling and creativity to create those shared experiences because one thing that you, you can't replicate through watching a show on Netflix is that sense that we're all in it together, but what they can do because of their vast marketing budgets and all kinds of resources and the fact that they're in your house already. You can create a sense of event by when you drop a show on Netflix, and people responding to it, and how can we create that same sense of shared event on the human scale of theater, I think it's my, my big thing that I want to be asking everybody.

55:42

Wonderful. Thanks Tom. We're going to take a moment here to pause and swap interpreters, and also let all of those wonderful provocations, sink in. Are you ready Lynne. Fantastic, thank you. All right, so the next 20 minutes or so great, we're doing really well for time. Good job everyone. The next 20 minutes or so will pick up on some of those provocations and some of those ideas that came out in those introductions, and I'll ask the panel to respond to the things that each other have brought up. And I love this because this is where my head is from from Tom's contribution. The sense of event the, the human scale of theater I think is a really, really good phrase, I think there's some sometimes I've heard people say, Oh, well, why should I bother putting my show online because Netflix is better at it. And I think the, the human scale of it the events Enos, and the live, potentially the interactivity of it. For me interactivity is a really big part of what theater can do online that that Netflix can't. So, I wonder if anyone else has, has thoughts about how you see your work as different than what Netflix is doing.

57:19

I'm happy to jump in and though I mean I not to start off, disagreeing with Tom who's a really lovely person but I don't think I personally don't think it's very helpful to think about how can we compete with Netflix, I think, I find when I have that conversation and it completely shuts down the conversation. I I've actually spent this time watching a lot of digital theater, some that I haven't really liked some of it just kind of, but I found that really exciting I probably watched less Netflix, especially in like lockdown number one in lockdown number two because I was just trying to understand what was this new form, emerging that might not be there later and Netflix would still be there later somehow and it was giving something different. And I think I've also sort of experimented with streaming my own events both like streaming and kind of like archive material and also doing like a live events like kind of events with like lots of different performers. And what I found about that is it's putting that energy into whatever that virtual for a space, or whatever the watch long space is that really does it and that's something I completely nicked wholesale from watching shit theaters. Shit actually actually at home because that they had a whatsapp watch along and it was, it was so live it was genuinely live, and really interesting, and I thought okay I want to I want to steal that I'd also seen my wife best friend, which, you know how to kind of watch little model as well and I had like special sessions afterwards to chat with people I kind of took that, And what I, what I found is that audiences, there was something I think that Javan touched on which was like after there was you can watch this at any time and there's you can watch this at one time with people you know, because you enter the WhatsApp, or you enter the room like, Alright, I know Kevin I know Giovanna know Tom. Now we can message each other while we're watching a thing. I think it doesn't serve all kinds of work, like I think it works really well when it's something like comedy or storytelling where you can come in and out, or, you know I stream something it's like something a lot of people wanted to watch for second time they could talk during it, but I also found it really interesting that initially I thought, Oh no, people are talking during an event and then I realized, no, but this is a format where that's okay in the theater we can't talk out loud to each other, but I can choose to join this WhatsApp watch along or not, and I think there's also something that I think is about create taking what is missing for me from theatrical space into into this hybrid model which is what is the before and after, which is also thing that has nothing to do with Netflix, it's what is the what is the virtual comparison to, I go into the bar I buy an overpriced wine. It is very good I say hello to Nick and I sit down, because I think the other thing I've noticed a lot of online work is there's so much attention to the piece, and there's very little attention in what the space is before and after and how we communicate door and and that that's I think probably one of the things that we're missing as much if not more than the shows we would be saying in this time and I'm personally really interested in direct audience development and figuring out that that before and after.

1:00:24

That's great poll I think I'm gonna actually bounce it back to Tom, because I think with the dare festival, you did something that I haven't seen anyone else do yet which is using this platform called gather, where you get this little avatar. And when you enter the digital space and you have to walk your avatar to the theater, and literally run into your friends on the way it was a completely different kind of experience. So I'm going to talk a bit about that.

1:00:51

Yeah, totally, I can I just come back on some of what Porter was saying first, and I hate I hate to have. I hate to have brought Netflix into the room because actually I think we agree on pretty much everything, but I do think it is important to note that, and something that easily pointed out on a blog recently is that when we, when we operate in spaces that people can use at home were part of the attention economy in a way that we're not, I mean we are any, I mean that the attention economy is the economy but like it's very different when we go to a live theatre space versus the kinds of experience for audiences, when, when you're in your, in your place of residence compared to, you know when you visit a live space are really different. And, and how we create, how we create and curate those experiences, I think, I think Paul is spot on. I think like most of the time, there isn't a lot of attention given by artists to the before and after of a digital event and to be fair, that's because like, I mean, so many artists have had to learn so many things in the course of the last year and then to suddenly go oh my god like now we have to think of this whole other layer, but when you're creating, when you're creating a piece of potential performance, you've got two big challenges and the first one is that, probably, people are. People are looking in 30 seconds before it's due to start and expecting everything to be ready, and the other is that you know people are all over the place in May, you know some people are really familiar with the medium and some people aren't. Some of us are super engaged in. I mean everyone on this call, we wouldn't be here if we weren't already super engaged in the arts, obviously, but so even within that like, you know, Paula has clearly engaged with a lot more digital stuff online than I have. But with, it means that your audience have a really different level of experience, whereas, and that's true when you go to the live there, when you go to the theater live whatever live means and 21st century as well. But um, yeah, how do you create a space in which audiences simultaneously feel safe and comfortable. And, but at the same time, also are able to, to have some of the same sense of interaction and participation that you would, you know, if you walked into the foyer at home. So what we did at their festival because we couldn't be in shortage Town Hall, we, we made an avatar of shortage channel online so we use this platform called GAFA, which is a, it's designed for conferencing, it's designed for remote compensates used by a lot people in the tech sector. And it basically creates a map of virtual space that you can explore and everybody who appears gets an avatar that they can move around to using, using arrow keys on a keyboard so it's like a, It looks a bit like sort of a 90s Legend of Zelda type thing. So I'm, I'm well into it, I was holding it like straight away when we saw it. The nice thing about it is it lets you swim for day, we basically created like a Fourier space, and you, you appear in that there are virtual ushers, who are real people who are actually insured at Town Hall, talking to you about where to go in virtual virtual shorter Town Hall, which is joyously confusing, and then you move around that space, there are various like interactive easter eggs that we put within that space for people to explore, but there is a main. There's a main space that you go to, and when you get there. Normally it opens a zoom link that takes you to another performance. And the feedback that we got on that was really from audiences artists loved it, artists, absolutely loved it because we're all trying to figure out how to do this stuff, audiences really depended, and it's sort of loosely correlated with how much digital theater that they'd seen. So, people who, people who had engaged with quite a bit of digital work and really enjoyed seeing something that wasn't unseen, because of course you know scene became so pervasive so early in the pandemic. And they really enjoyed the opportunity to meet with one another and we got that from, from some non theater, non theater professional audiences, as well, that they really enjoyed it but I think I think for the, for people who were working artists who maybe knew someone who was making one of those pieces of work. You know that feeling when you watch something on Zoom, and then you get to the end and you turn off and then you have to like WhatsApp your mate, or whatever, to go, oh hey I thought that was great, or if it's not someone who you know but you've like have a connection with or you've seen their work and they admire them and if you're in. If you're at CBT or something, you might just walk up and go, Hey, I just want to say how much I enjoyed that show, and you can't do that if you've just hit the leave button in the bottom rave history, so it's really nice for those audiences to be able to kind of wander around this data space, and like bump into someone in the corridor that was really cool. The flip side of that was we had, in particular, there was one show in the program this year that was aimed at families. And in general, what the people who had booked tickets for their kids to come and see the show, needed from us, with easy access, they needed to be able to click start at a particular time, they needed the show to start. They needed their kids to be able to watch it and they needed to basically click click a button and go away. In the same way that you know where my niece sits in front of a doggie. My niece is sitting in front of a doggie, and my sister can finally sit down for five minutes, you know, and I think that's the, I think that's one of the biggest challenges that we've got, as we continue exploring hybrid models, is how much input, or how much input, are we asking from our audiences, and how much are they prepared to give us which is why each of us sort of double screening idea is so cool because it means that people can people can be simultaneously and engage with us, and on multi devices, or they can be simultaneously engaged and not engaged at the same time. In the same way that we would with other forms of other forms of experience, and I'm not going to mention Netflix again, but something that you have, like, I was really struck, I'm watching the new season season of line of duty. The other night, and where, which is what's wrong, right, like that's what's wrong is not something that theatre has come up with none of the things actually that any listed at the beginning of things that have emerged from the theatre sector, they're all things that we have borrowed and adapted from elsewhere, I think. And so, yeah, like, what are the ways that we can. What are the ways that we can be nicking those ideas from other sectors in a way that work but also when, when we're inviting audiences into our digital spaces, how do we make it as easy for them as possible, to, to engage without sort of putting in extra layers of barriers to participation.

1:07:34

Right. We'll switch our BSL interpreters. So we'll pause for a moment.

1:07:46

Great. Thanks, Rachel. I can't believe how the time has flown. This has been really great and we're going to open up to questions in a minute. And so if you have any questions you'd like to ask the panel. Can you pop them in the chat or make yourself known to Nick, so that we can see you or hear you on screen. But before we do that I just want to go back to Kevin, because I think what Tom was mentioning, connects to what Kevin was saying about digital poverty and, like, the audience experience, how can we, what can we do what are you thinking about at home in terms of making sure audiences and artists can access these kinds of these kinds of shows.

1:08:34

Yeah, it's still an ongoing conversation I guess that we're having, but I think it's, I think that's what I was saying about from our perspective with, you know, it's weird how our shorthand became digital is is not live so like but also digital didn't mean online either my all the time. I think you know it's about as looking at what else is. We did a project where postcards were sent out in the post, people. We had things where you could pick it up from the venue. So it was also looking around that sort sort of element as well so it's not just always about like it zoom into YouTube it's this kind of stuff that is that is always, you know, online I suppose without using the D word of digital So, and also how is things adaptable as well so if it you know, is there is there an offline version, is there a way you can do that as well as doing it online as well so it's just that now sits I guess within everything we do and I think that sits. And so, building off what Tom was just saying as well I guess around access, which I think is, again, speaking as a venue, and to, you know, almost kind of throwing this out other venues you know I think the, the access of the what's happened over this year I think has been phenomenal in terms of star times adaptable, actually how accessible everything has been you know on the whole, I'm sure there are also ones that aren't but you know, From what I've seen that has been there, way, way more than anything was pre pandemic and actually how does that remain as a core thing and that venues can then just go back to how it used to be. Yeah, in that sense, so I think that also that the accessibility of everything has been, it's been a real boon I think over the last year with the digital stuff.

1:10:18

Great, thank you, and Gemma was talking about, you know, you don't have to be. You don't have to be super techie to make this stuff work. And, John, what would you say to people who are just getting started in digital theater, and who, who might, might not know where to begin. Yeah,

1:10:38

I mean I don't know I mean I think I would say a couple of things. One is I would say that I welcome Kevin saying, drawing attention to the how annoying the word digital is so like in terms that question about getting started with digital theater like. One thing I would say is that like, what's apparent is that there's nothing to worry about because it's just the same as making the show like just do it you know I mean in is literally just the same. In the same way that you don't know what to play. I mean absolutely the way I write plays like, oh these are interesting things I wonder if there's a way to make up Jetta mean, same, same, same sort of vibe. I sometimes joke that I think like I used to work at the I was. I've worked in theaters as well as Associate Director of the crucible for a year and a half as part of the Arts Council Changemakers program for vme people blah blah, and I used to tease other senior management colleagues at the crucible that hearing senior management people in British theatre talk about digital struck me as largely what I imagined it would be like to hear. BBC executives in the 1950s talk about rock and roll. Do you know I mean, this kind of just box of like fear, but that you're gonna have to open at some point because the kids like it. And so, I don't think there is like a straight up starting point, it's just about going is like any other two I happen to be an artist who's really really interested in forms you know I mean, so if you've got an interest in it. I think that just, it's just plays into, like everything else. And I think one little thing I would just say on the end of what Kevin was saying if that was all right about this question of digital poverty and so on, is one of the things that I distrust is sometimes on the liberal liberal left side of things which I imagine most of us are on this call, sometimes I think the question of accessing diversity loses its punch, when we talk about accessibility and equity as a sort of generally vague thing. And then imagine how to how to try and get what we're doing to everyone in the world. I think these, these questions are actually much more transformative for organizations and for individuals, when you're dealing with going like, you know, for instance, this is where our building is just over there, there is like a community of Afghan refugees, you know, I mean, who've never engaged with what we've done, some of whom have got like this issues we've even got that issue, some of whom are broke some of it, so that that, that, that thing about, I think is really important that digital property as much as anything else to think really specifically about how race how social class or poverty or whatever is stopping people hanging out with you in that way that you would like to hang out with them, you know, I mean as opposed to a general, because sometimes when we do the general thing, We sometimes get into that competitive liberalism, Jr, to me, which I don't think is necessarily helpful.

1:13:37

Well put thanks to bad. I mean it go to some questions that we've got in the chat, and Nick I think we've got three people who want to verbally ask the question Is that right,

1:13:46

no the three written questions so Paula has responded to Esther's question around networks. The digital Performance Network in the chat, but I'll ask these three questions for you in the panel. The first one was Lou, I'd love to hear about funding for projects specifically funding, outside of the Arts Council. The question was to set around the digital lens that are worried that the digital landscape can make theater less accessible in terms of access to audiences for new artists, as opposed to an artist and their piece in a room above a pub being hosted by a theater, and a third one specifically to Tom from Alice which was called and if so did audience members get lost in the virtual shortage town hall and thus turn up late for their performance.

1:14:29

It's like come back on that one quickly.

1:14:30

Sure, go for it, Tom,

1:14:32

they, they could theoretically got lost, and I don't think anyone got lost. We did have a few people who couldn't figure out, Despite the built in like the built in tutorial functions and all that couldn't figure out how to navigate the avatar around the space, so they weren't really, they weren't lost but they were unable to enter the performance space because they were moving around like a confused person in a space. So what we did with with those guys was we just, we normally have hold the show, let them in, like, we put in some contingencies that help us sort of navigate them in send people directly makes all that kind of stuff. So yeah, that those are, it's kind of the same thing is that the barrier to participation that comes from enter from experiencing a piece of technology. If you have to try and learn. If any of us try to try and learn something in 30 seconds. It's difficult.

1:15:26

Yeah. Great, thanks so

1:15:32

I've seen there's another question as well about pricing that might go hand in hand with the funding question funding question there's one on pricing which is interesting thoughts on pricing as the years go on tickets are becoming more expensive and is there a danger it'll become like physical spaces, and I'm still the question about whether digital theater and access.

1:15:51

Thanks.

1:15:54

I have zero thoughts on funding, I would love someone else tell me about that in this realm, to be honest, but I can say a little bit on pricing, just by virtue of experimenting with with running events, completely off my own back without a venue, through this. And one of the things that I learned that was really surprising to me is having price scales like I, I think I just assumed if you had an event, and you said okay there's like low income is, whatever it is no income is this and I think me and my club were saying, abundant, at like the top tier, 12 or 15 price, I just assumed everyone would go, Okay, well then we're not paying for it or we're gonna pay the lowest possible. And actually what I found the last couple events I did is it was pretty even split between people who wanted to pay the top tier ticket price, and people who wanted who could afford to play the low tier ticket price and I found the same thing with workshops lately when people are asking me for rates more often I'm going, here's my scale from unfunded to NPO pitch yourself within that and I think that's something I found in this period, and also the question around audience development I can say a little bit about, I mean, again, one of the things that I found really interesting in this time has been building more of direct relationship with my audience like I've I've always, I've always had a big print social media and use social media as a way of sharing my work, but I, at the beginning of the year I did have quite a lot booked in in terms of touring and so I restarted my, my newsletter, thinking I was going to be selling all this work that I was producing lifespaces Which obviously got cancelled this time last year, but I decided I was still going to develop this newsletter, and I went from having about 40 subscribers back in March, to having about 400 to 450, just over the last few months. And the other thing that I found this really interesting about that is, then when I've sold tickets for things or I've increasingly been just selling things through that newsletter, people buy them, and they and there's a really high take up of that that's something I would not have learned before this period because I was always reliant maybe too reliant on the venue, so that's another thing I suppose I could share.

1:18:04

That's great. Thanks, Paula. That kind of connects with what Suzette was asking about, you know, making the digital, digital landscape making theater less accessible as, in terms of access to audiences for new artists. And, you know, if you're an emerging artist you can get a room of every pub and be hosted by a theater and theater will help you get an audience in sometimes. And I would say that actually there's, there's a lot of scope for artists to completely bypass gatekeepers, with digital work and this is what people were saying, back when YouTube first became a thing that you know anybody now can be a content creator. And you can, you can just put your stuff out into the world, and it does mean that artists have to become their own marketing officers to, to get the word out to find their audience, Tom, do you have some thoughts on that.

1:19:02

Yeah, we were doing that anyway. We were all doing that anyway. And, and just just to come back to, to what Suzanne was saying specifically about the room the buffer part. And with huge respect to all of the brilliant artists who run those rooms, and all the brilliant artists who performed in those rooms. The room of a pub, someone is making money off of your work. It's not normally the people who run the venue of the pub, it's normally the brewery, or the landlord, like, not even the landlord at the pub the landlord of the building at the pub this port on. There's so much overhead in ruins but I mean, say upstart started doing shows in rooms about pubs and we don't do them anymore because they they drain, cash, time, energy, and by and large, you know, unless you unless you're at some a really good venue doesn't have the capacity because they don't have the staff to be seriously leveraging your work in terms of marketing Sunday, like, and there are some really great ones out there. But, actually. The great thing about the digital realm that we are working on much more is exactly what Paula just said, you know you have a completely different relationship with your artists. If you're selling things directly to them, you're building your meeting this much more quickly. We have experiences with venues where, you know, posts, post performance we've asked if it's, you know, or even pre show venues now, like, have a better GDPR problem about sharing book error information, which you don't have if, again you're selling tickets directly to people via Eventbrite, you can you can gather data so actually I think you can do quite a lot more. And like our mailing list engagements, our social media stats, over the last year have have really demonstrated that to me. And yeah, we were all doing our own show marketing. Anyway, most of us I think in the sector.

1:20:57

Great. So, Dan is pointing out in the chat room above a pub, it's usually inaccessible to wheelchair users, which is a big issue with wrench data Yeah. Right, there's one more question and we've got one minute. Does anyone have any thoughts on this, this question about making art pieces as an interactive film like Bandersnatch from Black Mirror on Netflix, and the audience interaction on this.

1:21:23

I could throw in on this. Right, rich kids is basically like if you squint, it's an interactive film. So, yeah, I mean look, I'd say this two things one is like, same as if it was in a theater which is, if you've got audience interaction. You just need to make space for it right, did I mean so it's about a relationship between what's happening, being broadcast like it will be in the space, and making sure there's space. In fact, Direct orally and whatever else for that moment of interaction to breathe and do its thing. And, and all that stuff is stuff that you'd work out just in the same way you would if it was if it was a kind of like, you know, an in person event for rose like the learning curve of like doing that stuff, digitally, was largely about working out how we were going to make all the stuff happen. And look like a bit of magic, as you want, you know, I mean, so that's like, for me, if I had a practical thing to say, I would just go, you know, make sure in year, in year when you're directing the measuring your ears or schedule or whatever you're willing to lose a day to play with Instagram Live Feed blogs, you know, I mean, like, just shit like that basic nature I mean, we, We basically ended up making rich kids largely through bit a bit software called Open broadcasting software OBS, which is absolutely free, is that free where stuff, and it's how Twitch streamers and stuff work. And, yeah, man, we, we needed to have a bit of time to the production management people could play around with that. Do you know I mean, so it's just about just about being a little bit baggy I think in terms of just in the same way again I go back to this like silly metaphor of like is like super old school devising theatre stuff, you know, I mean, in the same way that if we were like, if we were being really 80s And we have like a, an 80s devising company we're like, we're gonna put ladders in this show Jeremy people gonna be running up and down ladders, they'll be twiddled in the ladders, blah blah blah, you'd have like two days of ladders here, you know, I mean,

1:23:38

that's a really great way of thinking about it. Thank you. And thank you everyone I realized we've got to wrap up now. Thank you so much to Rachel and Lynn, and Nick and Kevin, Tom, Paula and Giovanni, this has been a really interesting lovely conversation. I'm just going to end by throwing a couple of links in the chat and doing a cheeky plug really for the theater maker program at the cockpit, and we're in May and running a devising online course, which is all about getting to grips with these digital tools. I've also created a zoom theater Starter Guide that I'm putting in the chat now. And I would really encourage everyone who's interested in this to join the digital Performance Network that Paula mentioned earlier the link to that is in the chat as well and it's also in the Zoom theatre Starter Guide. Wonderful. Let's yeah let's see what happens. I think there's a wide open field of possibility here and some really interesting questions. And yes, some, some pretty inventive determined, artists and programmers working on, on exploring what this is going to turn into So, congratulations to everyone for being part of this, you know, at the start of this new phase I think in in theater making. Brilliant. With that I will say thank you all and take care. Bye.

1:25:14

Thank you all very much. I'll close the link now. Have a good day.

1:25:19

Bye everyone.