

OUTBOX 2015-18 PROJECT EVALUATION

May 2018



ABOUT OUTBOX - LGBT THEATRE PROJECT

Outbox is an intergenerational project that uses theatre and performance skills to bring Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) communities together.

Through the delivery of creative workshops and performances across the UK, the project creates spaces for individuals to feel healthier and happier, developing better-connected and more resilient communities.

Theatre work made is shared to wider audiences to promote positive conversations, connect communities and increase visibility and representation of LGBT experiences.

ABOUT THE ROYAL CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH AND DRAMA

Founded in 1906 and incorporated in the University of London in 2005, the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD) is based in Swiss Cottage in London. Offering world leading training and education in vocational and applied theatre specialities, RCSSD is a higher education conservatoire. In particular, RCSSD is reputed for work in community theatre with highly ranked degree programmes in Applied Theatre and an outreach department working with communities across the country.

RCSSD delivers the Outbox project under the leadership of lecturer Ben Buratta.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Over the last 3 years, Outbox has forged and fostered positive working relationships with the following key stakeholders in order to reach and work together with diverse groups of people from the LGBT community. In addition to linking Outbox to the people the project seeks to interact with and support, these key partners are uniquely positioned to advise Outbox about the changing needs of target participants. This structure helps to ensure that Outbox are always at the forefront of understanding, equipped with vital knowledge to help steer their approach:



ODL is the UK's largest charity founded specifically to serve the needs of older LGBT people. Providing information, support and social opportunities, ODL develop networks and communities for people aged over 50 who identify as LGBT.

Outbox works together with ODL to provide creative opportunities for service users.



The Proud Trust is a leading organisation working with LGBT youth in the North-West. Enhancing lives through youth groups, peer support and their LGBT Centre, The Proud Trust instigates positive social change by empowering young people.

The Proud Trust represents just one of the many youth organisations Outbox collaborates with in the UK.



Established in 2008, Gendered Intelligence work specifically with the trans community. By both supporting young trans people and delivering training programmes in all sectors, the charity's mission is to increase understanding around gender diversity.

Gendered Intelligence partner with Outbox to run 'TransActing' - acting technique workshops for young trans people.

KEY PEOPLE



BEN BURATTA

Ben is a theatre director, researcher and lecturer on the BA Drama, Applied Theatre and Education course at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London.

His interests lie in making quality theatre for, and with communities. He has worked in a broad range of arts, community, and education settings and in many leading UK theatres including The Almeida, National Youth Theatre, The Roundhouse and Prime Theatre as well as schools, hostels and pupil referral units.

Ben is Artistic Director of Outbox, directing performances, running the national participation programme and creatively leading all inter-generational participatory work.



BARRY FITZGERALD

Barry is performer, theatre-maker and facilitator. He has recently worked as a performer with Punchdrunk and as a creative associate at the Royal Court. Barry's work has seen him devise shows for venues including the Arcola, Birmingham Rep, Contact Manchester, Hackney Showroom, Shoreditch Town Hall and The Glory.

Barry is a visiting lecturer at Arts Ed London and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Barry is an Associate Artist with Outbox and lead acting tutor on 'TransActing', in which he engages trans and/or non-binary people in creative training.



SOPH NURSE

Soph is an independent producer whose work spans theatre, ethnographic film and qualitative research. Her key interests are working with companies, artists and participants in devised, movement based, community and documentary contexts. Previous experience in theatre includes work at Battersea Arts Centre, Bush Theatre and the Royal Court.

Sophie holds a BA (Hons) Directing degree from Drama Centre London and a Postgraduate Certificate in Facilitation: Applied Theatre from the RCSSD. She also trained at AQR:

The Association of Qualitative Research, London.

Soph began working with Outbox in an advisory capacity in 2017 and has compiled this report.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The project has three output strands that will be explored separately in this evaluative review:

- 1) LGBT Youth Workshops
- 2) Working with LGBT Older people
- 3) Theatre Performances for the Wider Community

In examining each project component, this evaluation seeks to reflect on the output, outcomes, and impact of Outbox's work from 2015-18.

With an ambition of offering opportunities for creativity and expression for the LGBT community on a long-term and sustainable basis, it's incredibly valuable to review the work that has been planned and delivered during this four-year phase. In doing this, the project has been monitored in order to determine the extent to which the project has met its predetermined objectives. The monitoring processes put in place at the start of the project have enabled Outbox to gather qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to project strengths and challenges.

Supported and guided by the experience of RCSSD, Outbox have consistently tracked project progress in the following ways:

- Inclusive round-table discussion meetings with a steering group comprised of participants of all ages and backgrounds
- Recorded face-to-face interviews with participants from each of the three different project output strands
- Briefing sessions for youth/care workers implemented prior to all workshops, followed by evaluation sessions directly after each workshop
- Feedback forms distributed to all participants and youth/care workers in all youth workshop settings
- Face-to-face audience feedback following theatre performances
- Regular documented meetings between Outbox staff members and project partners
- Aggregation of publicly expressed feedback from audiences, participants, partners, and other industry spokespeople gathered from social media platforms on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other PR coverage
- Photo and video documentation of varied project activities



OVERALL PROJECT OBJECTIVE

This project seeks to offer safe spaces for individuals from the LGBT community to communicate and connect with other LGBT people and express their beliefs and feelings with the wider community through arts based, educational and performance opportunities. All activities are undertaken as a means to addressing proven issues within the LGBT community of low self-esteem, low self-confidence and isolation. Areas of low income and disadvantage were communities particularly targeted in response to evidence of mental and physical health risks to LGBT people locally and nationally.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

300 younger LGBT people will have improved confidence and self-esteem by the end of the project

- People will have reported increased confidence and communication skills
- People will have taken part in workshops and feel more educated about LGBT issues and history.
- People will have taken part in a rehearsal process and performance reflecting their stories, experiences and identities

100 older LGBT people will feel less isolated and will have made a positive connection with younger LGBT people by the end of the project

- People will have been interviewed about their history
- People will have attended theatre workshops and rehearsals
- People will have reported positive experiences with younger members of their community

1) LGBT YOUTH WORKSHOPS

STATISTICS

- Nearly half (45%) of LGBT pupils - including 64% of trans pupils - are bullied for being LGBT in Britain's schools
- More than four in five trans young people have self-harmed, as have three in five lesbian, gay and bi young people who aren't trans
- More than two in five trans young people have attempted to take their own life, as have one in five lesbian, gay and bi students who aren't trans

(Stonewall, 2018)

OUTPUT

Eight different LGBT youth groups across the country have received day-long drama workshops planned and delivered by Outbox. These young people range in age from 13-25, with an average group size of 20 participants. The workshops focus on educating young people about LGBT history, culture and social well-being in a creative context. Sessions were delivered by trained facilitators in collaboration with resident youth organisation workers in Brighton, Bristol, London, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham. A total of 24 workshops were delivered to these eight groups in the last 3 years.

OUTCOMES

Outbox's drama and expressive workshop activities provided a safe space for participants to explore identity, LGBT history and issues around mental health through performance. Examining this subject matter in this way, fills a gap that exists in provision of this information from schools. Participants reported highly positive experiences of the workshops, especially working together with other people in their groups in new ways and sharing/hearing stories. Participants also expressed a desire for the project to continue running and for sessions to run more regularly. This was particularly prevalent in locations in the North of the UK. Youth/care workers noted uptake from young people who wouldn't ordinarily take part in workshops.

The practical and active theatrical approach employed in the workshops encouraged and reinforced increased levels of self-confidence, self-esteem and positive communication skills. 77% of participants said they felt more confident as a result of working with Outbox.

Led and facilitated by Outbox project workers, workshop sessions offered groups opportunities to interact with and take inspiration from positive role models and a welcoming introduction to the LGBT community from those role models. Across locations, both youth/care workers and participants themselves remarked upon the high quality of workshops delivered by Outbox's facilitators.

The LGBT only environment hosted meant participants were surrounded by and interacting solely with like-minded peers. 30% of the workshops were called 'TransActing' workshops and were delivered to trans only groups. All workshops cultivated atmospheres of trust, safety and promoted freedom of speech. Participants expressed how valuable and precious these spaces were. 68% of participants said it was 'extremely important' to work creatively in a trans and/or non-binary space.

The creation of these spaces allowed Outbox to moderate important conversations between participants and their youth workers. Attendees were invited to participate as much as they wanted to, but were also offered the option to simply observe if this felt more comfortable to do so, which was noted as constructive.

IMPACT

Within workshop contexts, conversations around identity naturally raised discussion around participants' aspirations – relative to careers, further education, transferrable skills and creativity. Additionally, working in new creative ways permitted expansion of conversation amongst those with pre-existing friendships and relationships, bringing people closer together.

By using testimonies from our elder participants as stimulus material for conversations and exercises around LGBT experiences and history, Outbox allowed young people to access an intergenerational link and consciously connect to a broader spectrum of their community, often previously unknown to them.

Feedback from the LGBT youth organisations revealed that the workshops Outbox provide fulfil a long-term need to offer a variety of activities, allowing LGBT youth services to engage with their users in innovative ways. Youth/care workers also expressed the benefits of the briefing and evaluative sessions offered before and after workshops as a means to developing their own capabilities to lead workshops more creatively long-term.

For both Outbox and our partner organisations, feedback captured from young participants helps staff keep abreast of the changing needs of nationwide LGBT youth. This benefits both the wider project and society. Sharing this information with our partner organisations enables all organisations to adapt and improve their support for these young people better.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

"I felt more confident from learning about other people's experiences that I could relate to"

Anon, 14-18, London

"It was really good, especially as there was no pressure to participate. Empowering"

Cai, 14-18, Bristol

"Being in a trans space mattered. I felt I had full freedom to express myself without judgement and it was a safe space. Being trans is often about hiding or fitting in, walking or moving in a certain way. I loved being able to be expressive"

Anon

"I found it extremely interesting and helpful... in building confidence. I enjoyed the movement class but particularly the voice lesson. I think voice is something a lot of trans people struggle with in the early days and it was so lovely seeing people leave the room with so much more confidence about how they sound. The teacher was amazing. Can't wait for the next one"

Anon

"[The workshop] allowed everyone to connect with people they would not normally connect with"

Tara, 25-34, Brighton



PARTNER FEEDBACK

"LGBT young people always respond well to Outbox's work. Their approach is enabling and ensures young people are central to the process. It is fun and builds confidence"

Sally Carr MBE, Proud Trust

"Young people who wouldn't usually engage with our optional workshops took part and had a go at the fun and easy to engage with activities... Sessions are top quality and facilitators thoughtful, mindful and talented. Thank you"

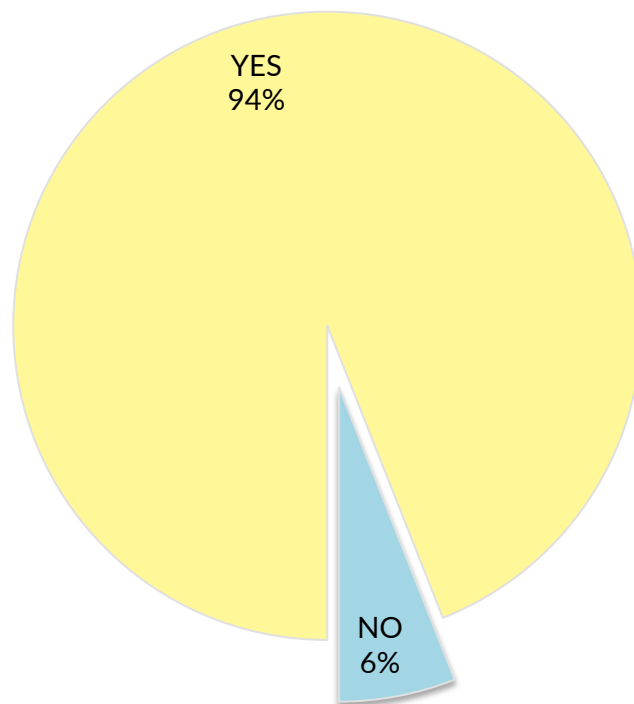
Henry Poulteney, Freedom Youth Bristol

"Young trans people tend to be extremely reluctant to join mainstream youth theatre groups... The Outbox and GI partnership has developed as a result of aligned aspirations to provide high quality creative engagement for a group of young people who are most often, marginalised and excluded"

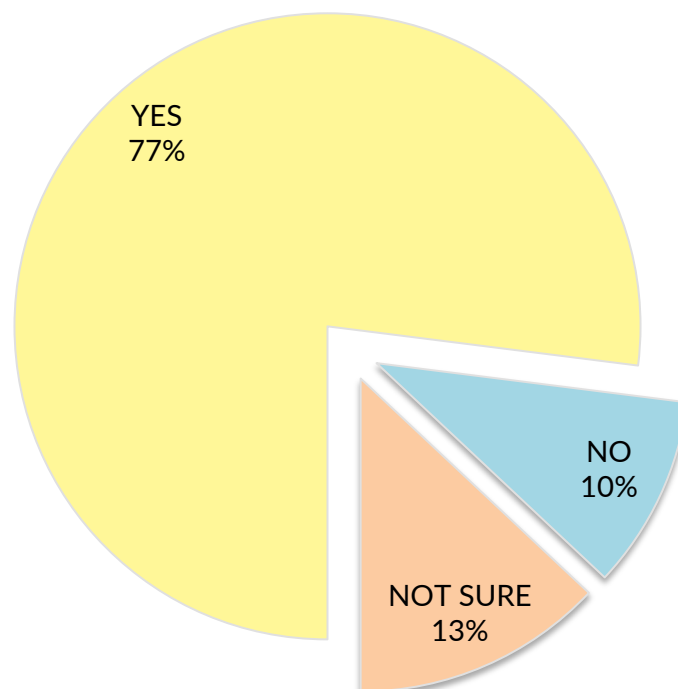
Directors, Gendered Intelligence

QUANTATATIVE FEEDBACK

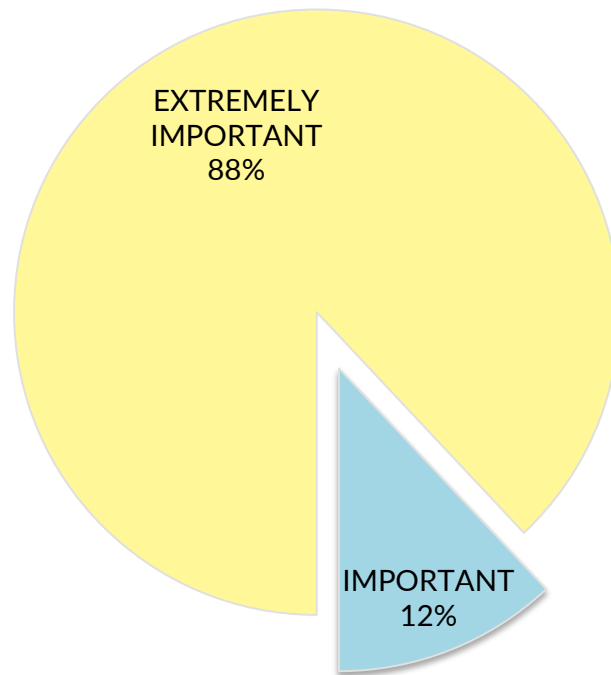
Would You Like To Take Part In More Work With Outbox?



Do You Feel More Confident After The Workshop?



How Important Is It For LGBT Communities To Have Space To Share Stories?



CASE STUDY:

Barry Fitzgerald – Facilitator

Can you tell me about a particular workshop that's memorable?

There are so many moments it's difficult to choose - from small, seemingly simple changes in a young person who stands up at the end of a workshop and delivers text they've written themselves when they could barely give eye contact at the beginning, to repeat workshops, where you can see how participants have grown and how they are now helping others gain confidence.



A more specific example would be in a recent Manchester workshop - we read some text from our latest show, which explored gender identities. The group devised movement pieces in response to the text and I remember working with young trans person who seemed to be struggling with ideas. I encouraged him to go with his instinct, nothing was wrong and slowly a few movements came to him. At the end of the workshop, he came up to me and said that he'd never seen himself so strongly in a piece of text or been told that way he moved was true or appreciated.

From your point of view as a facilitator, what's the most satisfying aspect of the Outbox workshops?

The space to share stories - both from Outbox's work and from the participants themselves. There's always a point in a workshop where someone will share or say something that they wouldn't have had the space to do so before, at least not in a creative way. Seeing ideas being explored collectively and shared back to a group of peers feels transformative. I feel you can often feel participants walking away a little taller by the time the workshop is over.

Why are the Outbox workshops important?

Because the participants tell me they are. After every workshop I've always had people, young and old, come up to me and ask when and where our next workshop will be or how it's made them think about themselves and our community differently. When people tell me that they feel less alone, more confident and inspired, that's always a big sign of how important these workshops are for people.

2) WORKING WITH LGBT OLDER PEOPLE



STATISTICS

- Many older gay people express considerable worries about the future – about having to hide their sexual orientation, about having to move into a care home that is designed for heterosexual people and about a lack of opportunity to socialise with other older gay people
- 41% of lesbian, gay and bisexual older people live alone compared to 28% of heterosexual older people
- 50% of older gay people feel their sexual orientation has, or will have, a negative effect on getting older
- Gay people are much more likely than heterosexual people to face the prospect of living alone with limited personal help from their families and therefore are more likely to rely on formal services for support in later life

(Stonewall, 2018)

OUTPUT

Three workshops for LGBT older people, followed by three further workshops combining LGBT older people and LGBT youth participants were planned and delivered by Outbox. In total, 10 workshops were delivered as part of this component of the project in the last three years.

Older people ranged in age from 60-90, with an average group size of 10 participants in the older people-only groups and 20 participants in the intergenerational groups. Outbox collaborated with partner charities (such as Opening Doors) that work specifically with older

LGBT people to connect with individuals and welcome them to take part in workshops, interviews and performances in the older people only groups. The intergenerational groups that followed, provided a forum in which older and younger LGBT people could meet and socially interact.

Workshops took the form of conversations and exercises in which participants were invited to communicate together, share stories and reminiscences and discuss contemporary issues faced by LGBT people of all ages. Information and memories shared by LGBT older people were then (with their permission) utilised to inform and act as provocation for exercises and stories woven into the shows performed to public audiences (see 'THEATRE PERFORMANCES FOR THE WIDER COMMUNITY').

OUTCOMES

The provision of space for older generations of LGBT people to connect with LGBT young people holds appeal and value on both sides. Participants describe the benefits of meeting individuals from different sections of the LGBT community as interesting, memorable and important.

As a result of the intergenerational workshops, connections are formed between the generations. These links are further strengthened when Outbox invite the LGBT older people to visit the rehearsal room for the shows created (see 'THEATRE PERFORMANCES FOR THE WIDER COMMUNITY'). These visits give LGBT older people the opportunity to feed their input in, be a part of the creative making process and ownership around the work.

IMPACT

For the older people Outbox connected with as part of this project, the workshops, rehearsal room time and performance opportunities presented a series of opportunities to socialise, link with other LGBT people in an inclusive setting. Relative to the known prevalence of isolation experienced by the elder LGBT community, this structured offer of interaction moments gave participants ties to the wider LGBT community in ways many did not previously have, or feel able to access in a comfortable way. 100% of older participants reported less isolation after the workshops.

Capturing stories from the LGBT community as part of this work also means Outbox have begun to compile a rich resource of testimony that has legacy and archival potential.



Photo credit: Gay Times

CASE STUDY

Jonathan Blake – Elder Participant

Jonathan who is in his late 60s, provided a testimonial interview as part of an Outbox workshop which then went on to inform 'AFFECTION', a show that focused on the experience of men living with HIV. Within an Outbox workshop setting, Jonathan who was diagnosed with HIV in 1982, shared his experience with James* (in his 20s) and had recently been diagnosed himself. By empowering these participants in the workshop setting, Outbox facilitated a landmark conversation, the wider result of which was publically reducing shame and stigma around HIV.

Jonathan joined rehearsals, contributed to the creative making process as it developed and connected with the whole company working on the show. In doing this, Jonathan helped raise awareness of HIV (by dispelling myths and educating around it), reduce shame and stigma around this issue and the resulting show promoted healthier and safer sexual relationships.

For 'AFFECTION' Outbox worked with Positive East - the UK's largest charity offering services and care to people diagnosed with HIV and 56 Street - Europe's largest sexual health clinic who have pioneered HIV care provision. These organisations helped link Outbox to healthcare professionals able to contribute deeper knowledge around the realities of life with HIV.

'AFFECTION' received a hugely positive critical reception which included Ben Buratta being interviewed for Attitude (leading Gay publication in the UK).

**Acts as a pseudonym to protect the identity of this person*

3) THEATRE PERFORMANCES FOR THE WIDER COMMUNITY

STATISTICS

- Just 6% of regular characters in broadcast scripted primetime programming were identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. (GLAAD, 2017-18)
- Only 37% of the LGB sample rated the BBC's portrayal of LGB people as good or very good and 37% of LGB people agreed that the BBC's portrayal of LGB people was stereotyped (Portrayal Consultation Report prepared by Kantar Media for the BBC, 2017)



OUTPUT

Three separate theatre productions have been organised, rehearsed and performed to public audiences by Outbox in theatre venues nationwide in the last three years. On average, each production process represents six weeks of solid work from production conception to completion, and involves contributions from teams of up to 20 people. Two weeks are spent running workshops, two weeks devising, two weeks rehearsing and two week performing. Led by Outbox staff members, the narrative structures of the shows are drawn from testimonies

and real experiences of Outbox's project participants, as a means to reflecting authentic stories representing the LGBT experience.

In every production the cast of performers comprises a mixture of trained actors and community participants, with all performers playing an active role in generating and shaping the theatrical material shared in the final work.

When casting each show, Outbox issues an open and inclusive call out for expressions of interest from individuals keen to find out more/participate. This casting call out is shared extensively on social media channels, by our partner organisations and through word of mouth to reach as many potential participants as possible. Additional freelance creative professionals are employed to support each production to create work of the highest industry standard, including PR and marketing support to communicate news of the shows to the wider LGBT community.

Outbox's shows benefit both the participants involved in making them, and the audiences that see them. Over the past three years 1,700 audience members have attended and enjoyed Outbox's productions, 45 people have been employed in the process of mounting these shows and 30 participants have contributed/performed in an Outbox show.

The three aforementioned productions were developed in London and then toured to theatre venues in Birmingham and Manchester. The productions were called 'HOOKUP', 'AFFECTION' and 'AND THE REST OF ME FLOATS'. More information about each show follows:

HOOKUP



Amidst glitter, smoke & mirror balls, *HOOKUP* took a frank and intimate look at the fears and thrills of discovering sex and sustaining sexuality across the decades.

This show was made in response to the discussions and workshops held between younger and older LGBT people. Older LGBT people felt it important to discuss safe and healthy sexual relationships. Younger participants felt it important to represent the older participants' interviews through recorded passages in to include the stories from previous decades.

Performers

Cassandra Bond	Barry Fitzgerald
Tigger Blaize	Gareth Kennerley
Rebecca Crankshaw	Andrew Lambe
Christopher Currie	Denholm Spurr
Isis Davies	Yasmin Zadeh

Director	Ben Buratta
Writer	Jodi Gray and the company
Designer	Harry Whitham
Movement	Gerard Martin
Sound Designer	Dominic Kennedy
Production Manager	Daniel Starmer
Stage Manager	Beth Absalom

Performance Dates:

9-12th September 2015 at [Hackney Showroom, London](#)
19th September 2015 at [Contact Theatre, Manchester](#)

AFFECTION



In 2016 more gay men than ever were contracting HIV. Confusion surrounded what it was to be positive and undetectable, and the government were denying medicine to the most vulnerable and at-risk. AFFECTION was a raw, funny and honest show about bodies, intimacy and HIV.

This show was made as a result of increasing numbers of HIV transmission amongst the LGBT community. An intergenerational dialogue offered younger participants an educative history of the AIDS crisis.

Performers

Rebecca Crankshaw	Barry Fitzgerald
Aiden Crawford	Conor Gormally
Gavin Duff	Elijah W Harris
Josh Enright	Jack McMahon

Director	Ben Buratta
Writer	Jodi Gray and the company
Designer	Harry Whitham
Movement	Coral Messam
Video Design	Iain Syme
Lighting Design	Zoe Spurr
Sound Design	Dominic Kennedy
Stage Manager	Beth Absalom

Performance Dates:

13-24 September 2016 at [The Glory, London](#)

30 September & 1 October at [A.E. Harris Theatre, Birmingham](#)

AND THE REST OF ME FLOATS



Working with performers from across the trans, non-binary, lesbian and gay communities, AND THE REST OF ME FLOATS examined the ways in which gender is questioned, categorised, and policed.

The show was made in order to raise visibility of the trans community and strive to address the lack of knowledge around trans lives and experiences.

Performers

Josh Enright	Tamir Pettet
Barry Fitzgerald	Miiko Toiviainen
Elijah W Harris	Yasmin Zadeh
Emily Joh Miller	

Director	Ben Buratta
Designer	Ruta Irbite
Movement	Coral Messam
Lighting Design	Jess Bernberg
Sound Design	Dominic Kennedy
Stage Manager	Ella Howe
Production Manager	James Asquith

Performance Dates:

12-23 September 2017 at [Rose Lipman Building, London](#)

13-14 November 2017 at [Birmingham Repertory Theatre](#) as part of [SHOUT Festival](#)



OUTCOMES

Outbox cultivates the notion of co-authorship between participants and creative leaders from the very start of each show process. This approach closes the gap between the two parties and increases the potential for feelings of belonging within the space. Fuelled by this environment and status quo, participants expressed their joy in the freedom offered to both discuss and process emotions and experiences in a theatrical context. This situation facilitated personal growth and moments of discovery for participants. The Outbox team and project leader Ben Buratta in particular, are frequently commended by participants for their dedication, skill and sensitivity.

Although daunting at first (as it's a new experience), drawing from their own experiences to contribute to show material is described by participants as hugely liberating, cathartic and therapeutic. Also, the opportunity to play characters they themselves have created that champion the truth and validity of their identity, allows participants to represent marginalised voices rarely seen in the media. Crucially, this means participants are taking an active role in what characters deliver to audiences, thus engaging in positive representation of themselves.

The creative making process involves teamwork, communication, expression, control, courage and experimentation. This offers participants the chance to explore the capabilities of their ideas, voices and bodies in a supported setting. In doing so, participants report lasting satisfaction in the development of skills, valuable feelings of belonging, and improved self-worth.

Performing live to a receptive audience is reported to be a hugely positive and empowering experience for both the individual and cast as a team. Participants express strong and meaningful connections felt between both themselves and other cast members and themselves and audiences, that feel mutually celebratory, vital and moving.

LGBT audiences attending Outbox's shows, have remarked how refreshing it is to see characters they can connect closely with, and stories which profoundly resonate with their own lives. This is expressed to be an experience that is rare in mainstream media.

IMPACT

Sustained involvement in the show making processes (over the six week period) enabled positive relationships and enduring friendships to blossom with many former participants still meeting up to socialise with other individuals they met during previous projects. In some cases, individuals and groups of participants have been inspired to instigate their own creative projects as a result of working with Outbox and the wider understanding of the industry landscape it's provided. Examples of this include personal writing projects and the formation of an agency that specialises in the representation of queer artists.

Alongside 900+ members of the public who have seen each show, these public events have been attended by arts industry professionals, community leaders and school groups. In 2017, a class of 25 Year 10 students came to see *AND THE REST OF ME FLOATS*, accompanied by their teacher. The teacher reported increased understanding and acceptance of the trans community amongst the year group. During post-show discussions, audience members have openly discussed how affirming being a part of the audience community is, as it creates a space for dialogues around the show's topics. This in turn promotes increased visibility, education and understanding around LGBT experiences and also crucially normalises the conversation around gender and LGBT issues. The 'liveness' of the show experience is an active and present one and the theatricalisation of stories (bolstered by sound, lighting, video effects etc.) brings show themes into sharp focus, tapping directly into the sensation of experiences in a unique way for audiences.

The opportunity for both participants and audiences members to mix and mingle in a social context (usually in a bar/café space) after the show, further adds to the joy felt in sharing stories together in the theatre space. This celebration of identity together, offers positive moments of connection between people, sometimes forging bonds between strangers – temporary and occasionally lasting.

Over the course of the last three years, the shows resulting from this competent of the Outbox project have grown in scale, ambition and success. The high standard of work, enthusiastic responses from audiences and highly relevant topics being discussed have resulted in attention and interest from renowned critics and industry leaders from major British theatre organisations.

ACTOR/PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

"I felt totally supported to be brave and push myself whilst feeling totally safe and in control of the whole process. I've never worked with such an inspiring team before, you become a family immediately and everyone is driven to create the shared vision the company has... Outbox allowed me to be myself, tell my narrative but most importantly be fiercely proud of who I am. Being surrounded by solely other members of the community sharing their stories and their expressions meant that we all learnt a huge amount and the solidarity and love in the process was mind blowing"

"Working with Outbox gave me so much courage and self-worth. It made me appreciate the stories I have to tell, that we have to tell, and led me to believe they deserve to be told. Our stories form bridges, and bridges, not walls, are what we so desperately need right now"

"A truly transcendent and liberating experience. The level of dedication Outbox has in telling the untold and overlooked stories of the queer community is truly something to be commended and celebrated... The compassion from the creative team and Ben Buratta himself is another true gift. As the driving force behind Outbox, Ben Buratta is skilled at crafting a safe and positive rehearsal space to explore queer issues that are so often misconstrued or misunderstood outside of the queer community"

"The rehearsal process taught me so much about the wealth of experiences within the LGBTQ community that until then I had never known anything about. I discovered new things about myself and this was both a challenge and a delight... There is no feeling in the world like performing and if you times that feeling by two, then that's how it feels to perform work that you know you have created yourself or had a very strong influence in"

"During rehearsals, I was continuously moved and excited by the diversity of the performers in the room. I guess you could say we were all othered through gender, sexuality, religion and/or race but working on the show seemed to almost eradicate that otherness. We could just be us, and work on our own terms, and it made me feel very seen, valued and equal. It's something I had never quite experienced in theatre before"

"When I was performing I could feel the connection with the audience – that the performance was not just a night at the theatre but a shared experience that meant something to all of us, performers and spectators alike. The community has a lot of unheard voices and you can feel the gratitude and power of letting those voices be heard"

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

 OutboxTheatre Retweeted

**Tris Hobson** @tris_hobson · 16 Sep 2017

@Outbox_Theatre I don't have the words to give #AndtheRestofMeFloats the praise it deserves. The most honest, beautiful, and joyous hour.

 1  2  8 

 OutboxTheatre Retweeted

**BOi BOX** @BoiBoxSoho · 22 Sep 2017

And The Rest Of Me Floats by @Outbox_Theatre is an explosively beautiful, honest, poignant & powerfully human snapshot of gender & identity.

  1  3 

 OutboxTheatre Retweeted

**Amie Taylor** @AmieAmieTay · 14 Sep 2017

Completely blown away by @Outbox_Theatre latest show on gender. Gorgeous, moving, entertaining & musical! And the Rest of Me Floats. Catch it!

  3  12 

 OutboxTheatre Retweeted

**Hello Mozart** @HelloMozart · 20 Sep 2017

What can I say about And The Rest Of Me Floats #ATROMF? Blown away by emotion & heart. I laughed, cried, danced! ★★★★★ @Outbox_Theatre



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INDUSTRY FEEBACK & REVIEWS

“Outbox may be a relatively young company but the clarity of its theatrical voice combined with its community roots make it an important one”

The Stage

☆☆☆☆☆

“And the Rest of Me Floats is an astonishing theatrical achievement. Go.”

Everything Theatre

☆☆☆☆

“A fantastic new production from Outbox, who are well on their way to dominating the world of queer theatre”

West End Wilma

CASE STUDY:

'And The Rest Of Me Floats' - Interview with participant/performer Yasmin Zadeh



How was the rehearsal process?

The rehearsal process was a very interesting inclusive experience. I felt like there was a lot of thought put into the overall experience for the performer. This included outside speakers, workshops and even down to the way Ben operated the rehearsal room. It was a safe room where we could unpack sensitive issues in order to make a very proud show that everyone was comfortable and excited to share with an audience.

Did you learn anything about your identity/queer theory/history?

Outbox was a very educational experience... In terms of history and queer theory these were always spoken of and considered in the room when making the show and became a reference point throughout the process. I personally didn't know too much about it before entering the rehearsal room so it was great to learn about it and have it influence the work.

Did it offer you a different perspective?

I felt that we held as a cast a new perspective as we all informed each other. As a performer I don't identify as male or female and to be able to explore that in the show was a very emotional and rare gift. I could see the same thing happening to other performers involved in the show so it was great to weave our stories together in a scene or movement piece to give a overall picture of what it means to be queer today.

Did it increase your confidence?

Experiences like this are special... My confidence is so much better as a performer and as a queer person. The space in which Outbox creates is so welcoming and stimulating you want to give everything to it in order to create the best possible show. I am really proud to have worked with Ben on such a delicate subject such as gender as we all learnt so much. Having people come up to me after the show and thanking me for sharing was very emotional as for a long time you do feel like you are alone in your experience growing up. I had a space I could express how I really felt on a daily basis and Ben made it into a piece of art that other people could enjoy and relate to.



LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Reflecting back on all three project sections over the entire project duration, the key learning unearthed through self-reflection and participant feedback is as follows: although Outbox is successfully meeting its objective for the LGBT community as a whole, the project currently faces limitations in certain areas to reach some segments of the community. Going forward Outbox seek to put plans in place to connect more closely with the following people to increase their prevalence in all areas of project work:

TRANS PEOPLE

Outbox have learned that trans people often have difficulty accessing mainstream services due to the associated problems they experience financially, socially etc. Trans people are also not as used to engaging in opportunities / potentially lack the self-confidence to take up opportunities that do arise.

OLDER WOMEN

Outbox have learned that older LGBT women feel that the male experience is given priority over theirs. There are also fewer opportunities specifically geared towards LGBT older women than there are for men. This point is explored in greater detail in the 'Working with LGBT Older people' that follows.

ETHNICALLY DIVERSE PARTICIPANTS

Outbox have learned that in order to reach an increased percentage of these people, specific communities need to be targeted which requires more work. Religious and cultural barriers can also be preventative factors.

In keeping with the rest of this evaluation, each of the component sections of this project will be now also be considered in turn.

LGBT Youth Workshops

Regional youth/care workers have expressed a desire to be trained by Outbox to help them better use theatre approaches and creativity as a means to facilitating expression in young people outside of Outbox's designated annual workshops. Outbox would very much like to provide this professional development as a means to reinforcing existing relationships with partner organisations, working towards more sustained relationships with group members and Outbox's creative approach having more lasting impact.

Reconnecting with participants on multiple occasions has shown Outbox that certain individuals require lots more space and time than would necessarily be expected to build the confidence and trust required to participate. Defining and upholding spaces that are unequivocally inclusive permits individuals to observe and consider what they feel comfortable to do / offer in terms of active participation. In some case Outbox has noted that certain individuals take years before taking a step towards certain activities. In other cases it has been noted that participants merely being present for Outbox workshops (set against other opportunities they do not take up), is proof of willingness and interest, but actually taking part can be process requiring much more patience and time.

Due to the highly sensitive and particular nature of their experience, trans young people have fed back that they want and need to work together more regularly in spaces dedicated solely to young trans people. In response to this need, Outbox began offering trans-specific workshop opportunities which have been received with overwhelming appreciation. As a means to driving towards greater sustainability for these participants, Outbox would like to develop a 'Summer School' opportunity offered specifically to trans people in the UK in response to the demand for extended time together in safe spaces equipped to help people explore identity, increase confidence and come together in meaningful ways.

Working with LGBT Older People

Outbox has observed an absence of women in the LGBT elder groups. Project workers have actively sought to encourage more women to join the workshops and in doing so have learned there is an appetite from women to participate. However what Outbox have also learned is that much like the trans young people previously mentioned, these older women want and need female-only spaces in order to do participate comfortably. Ideally these spaces would also be led by a female project worker/s who can better understand the experience, points of view and needs of women. In response to this learning, Outbox are seeking to employ a female project worker to work with the organization over the next four years to provide this environment. A female only steering group (which is being discussed) could also be a great way of connecting, while also giving these women the autonomy to express how projects could be run to best meet their needs.

Theatre Performances for the Wider Community

The decision to combine professional actors with community performers within the casts was important and beneficial. Blending these two groups together for the purposes of the show projects resulted in both sides being challenged to work in new ways and adapt as a means of cooperating and learning. Alongside Outbox staff, the trained actors encouraged and supported community performers to meet high standards of professionalism. As a result participants were

proud of the finished product that was respected and taken seriously by audiences.

It will remain significant for Outbox to create industry standard shows and employ theatre professionals to join the show projects to maintain the level of quality Outbox has now become known for delivering. Also, the evident momentum that has continued to grow around the theatrical output should be capitalised upon to raise Outbox's profile and simultaneously the mission of the project. In order to do this, the show portion of Outbox's work may well require deeper level investment in the coming years in terms of time, funding and allocation of resource.

Working in and performing in different theatre organisations has led to increased acquisition of knowledge for Outbox around venues' understanding of the LGBT community and the issues it faces. The company were at times met with fear, out-dated language and lack of confidence in dealing with LGBT people appropriately and inclusively. Outbox hopes to continue dialogues with all these venues and more besides, to better educate staff members in these areas (who are in many cases explicitly keen to learn), so that organisational processes and structures can be optimised for LGBT audiences. For example, displaying inclusive signs for venue toilets to signpost an understanding that people in their spaces identify with gender in differing ways. In this way Outbox acts as a change maker for inclusivity in the creative industry.

Outbox has a loyal and avid audience following. This is evident from the impressive ticket sale results for every show. Because tickets have always sold out, and in some cases prior to even the start of a theatrical run, so far Outbox have been unable to share their work with larger mainstream audiences. This should be a key consideration / goal in the next few years. Project specific strategic thinking will need to be employed to decide the best ways of achieving this – for example shows running for a longer time versus shows playing in larger spaces with greater capacities.

PROJECT OUTCOMES - RESULTS

OUTCOME 1

300 younger LGBT people will have improved confidence and self-esteem by the end of the project

CHANGE INDICATOR 1

People will have reported increased confidence and communication skills			
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
130 participants	93 participants	92 participants	315 participants

CHANGE INDICATOR 2

People will have taken part in workshops and feel more educated about LGBT issues and history			
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
144 participants	104 participants	102 participants	350 participants

CHANGE INDICATOR 3

People will have taken part in a rehearsal process and performance reflecting their stories, experiences and identities			
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
15 participants	15 participants	15 participants	45 participants

OUTCOME 2

100 older LGBT people will feel less isolated and will have made a positive connection with younger LGBT people by the end of the project

CHANGE INDICATOR 1

People will have been interviewed about their history			
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
20 participants	20 participants	25 participants	65 participants

CHANGE INDICATOR 2

People will have attended theatre workshops and rehearsals			
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
30 participants	30 participants	25 participants	75 participants

CHANGE INDICATOR 3

People will have reported positive experiences with younger members of their community			
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
41 participants	30 participants	40 participants	111 participants



CONCLUSIONS

Utilising the information contained within this evaluation, Outbox have expressed a wish to develop strategically and organisationally. To do this, as projects continue, processes will continue to be developed, improved and streamlined based upon ascertained areas for progression. This ambition to continuously evolve, illustrates Outbox's commitment to offering sustainable affiliation and engagement opportunities for the LGBT community.

The unique work that Outbox does in creating dynamic participatory opportunities; encouraging LGBT people of all ages to embark on a mission with them to raise the profile of the LGBT experience, by allowing them to engage with creativity in new and innovative ways is extremely valuable.

Reflecting on all three project components through consideration of all evaluative material and feedback it's clear that Outbox is not only a project that is meeting its goals, but it is an enterprise of significant value and importance to the community and participants it engages with. The key project staff, namely Ben Buratta and Barry Fitzgerald, demonstrate dedication to the project objectives. They also exhibit an acute awareness of the needs of the people the project seeks to serve and how they can continue to build on their offer to benefit more people, with continually consistent, high quality output. This judgment is informed by the positive feedback that abounds in all areas of the project, added to the repeated requests from participants and partners for Outbox's work to continue, and continue to grow.

Theatre methods employed by Outbox have a unique capacity to unlock creativity, encouraging varied positive outcomes for individuals and the wider communities they are a part of. Reading audience responses and reactions to the public shows Outbox has delivered, coupled with ticket sales data clearly demonstrates the need, appetite for and demand for this work. All three shows produced as part of this funding cycle sold out within the first week of opening,

indicates that the 'Theatre Performances for the Wider Community' in particular has scope to expand to meet this aforementioned demand.

Most persuasive however are the testimonials and feedback received from project partners, theatre venues and participants. This project's success in facilitating moments and sustained opportunities for people to develop and flourish is abundantly clear. Also the formation of bonds between people as a result of the projects' different activities is compelling. This is most strongly noted through interaction instigated between different generations and individuals who otherwise would be unlikely to connect together. Positive role modeling is a key deliverable offered by the Outbox team, which inspires participants to cooperate, communicate and join the LGBT community in a palpable way, the benefits of which continue to spread.

In order to broaden the Outbox offer, I anticipate that the project would be seeking to expand its staff base. This would be as a means to guarding against current members of staff becoming overstretched and also to collaborate with new gatekeepers to reach an even broader section of the LGBT community. Additionally, input from additional staff members would enable Outbox to expand its reach even further into other parts of the UK, particularly rural areas. Support for development in this direction would be supported by existing partnerships with regional theatre venues.

It will be exciting to see and continue to monitor how Outbox will grow considering the project's invaluable position as an agent for change and development in communities in the UK.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluator puts forward the following recommendations for consideration by the project staff as a means to ongoing development:

PROJECT EXPANSION AND GROWTH

- Planning time and budget allocation sought for the proposed 'Summer School' for young trans participants as previously mentioned in the 'Learning and Development' section of this report.
- Allocation of funding for additional Outbox staff members to support projects across the next three years. For example, a female project lead to connect and engage with older female participants
- Based on request from a participating youth group leader, an opportunity for all LGBT youth groups from across the UK to meet together, would create new connections between participants and partners on a national level
- Budget allocation for Outbox to undertake or commission research and to develop networks would enable the project to build relationships with new project partners in new regions and/or with new specialisms
- Long-term, consistency of space would offer Outbox a base and home all project work. Occupying a building or the acquisition of space dedicated for Outbox would give the project and it's community a designated place to work from and be rooted in. This would be a turning point for the project - reducing project costs and empowering the community by encouraging them to inhabit a space uniquely theirs. It would also offer a place for people to visit in a variety of contexts, giving the project ambitions a home, conducive to deeper engagement and sustainability for the LGBT community.

PROJECT LEGACY

- Collation of all visual assets in one place online for general public access then backed up securely offline for legacy purposes. This would require a budget allocation for creation and design of an accessible online hub
- Consideration of more legacy focused output as part of project work e.g. making a podcast / film. If hosted publically, this work could again be accessed by the general public
- The appointment of an independent evaluator at project start would permit more sustained involvement during the 3 year funding cycle and a deeper level of evaluation would be possible

BUILDING AUDIENCES

- Suggest Outbox consider hosting more Q&A events hosted after shows to capture, continue and formalize conversations between audiences and Outbox. Suggest these are audio / video recorded
- Outbox have an opportunity to increase accessibility of their shows to accommodate deaf audiences. This would involve a specific budget allocation, the creation of accessible marketing materials and sign language interpreted / captioned performances
- Suggest online surveys be sent out to all audiences following show attendance to capture more data and build up Outbox's mailing list for reconnection opportunities. Once a mailing list is compiled, I suggest sending out digital mail-shot emails on a bi-annual basis to keep audiences in touch with the company's developments and engagement opportunities

MONITORING PROCESSES

- Suggest using Google forms to capture feedback in one place digitally. This would develop the anonymity offer for feedback requested in hindsight from participants, industry freelancers and partners, encouraging deeper insight
- A formalised selection of a key individual/s at project initiations to compile visual logs / diaries of experience in the rehearsal process for Outbox show projects
- Suggest feedback forms be distributed to audiences after shows to capture information from wider LGBT community and also non-LGBT audiences. Alternatively if budget allows, audience reaction interviews could be made (in vox pop style) following a show. An edited compilation of this feedback could be used to later promote the show and relay feedback in a more visually qualitative way
- Development of feedback questionnaires and survey detailed questions with more defined metrics would mean an improved opportunity to capture more detailed quantitative data