



2024

Photograph: Jayne Jackson

"The Keepers" at Queen Charlotte care home, Dorset

theatre and community arts
Annual Report



www.bravebolddrama.co.uk

Contents

theatre

page 3:

The Midnight Mission

page 4:

The Keepers

page 5:

Sticky Ends!

page 6:

Pumpkins

page 7:

The Mexico Mission!

commissions & consultancy

page 8:

Giant Bristol Art Trail Mission

page 9:

Wiltshire Museums Arts Award consultancy

page 10:

Conferences

community arts

page 11-12:

Supermarket!

page 13:

Bridge Learning Campus Primary, Hartcliffe

page 14:

The Dragon's Almanac

page 15:

Early Years

page 16:

The Company of International Artists

other things

page 17:

Costs and Values

page 18:

Collaborators, Partners and Thanks

THE

**MIDNIGHT
MISSION!****9 SHOWS
FEB – OCT****493 AUDIENCE
MEMBERS****(SLIGHTLY SPOOKY)
PLAYABLE ADVENTURE
THEATRE FOR FAMILIES**

Our third tour of *THE MIDNIGHT MISSION!* travelled to six community settings in Dorset including several libraries and Weymouth College. We also performed the show at Shaftesbury Arts Centre and Tobacco Factory Theatres in Bristol.

This show is inspired by real-life literary events in 1816, when Lord Byron challenged Mary Shelley and John Polidori to a ghost story writing competition in Villa Diodati on the banks of Lake Geneva.

As with all our playable shows, audiences are enrolled as Creative Agents in an international art detective agency, the Company of International Artists, and work with onstage Agents Kahlo and Dali to investigate a potential haunting.

Audiences have case files, notepads and paper, and vote throughout the show to choose how the investigation proceeds.

AUDIENCE REVIEWS**Incredibly funny and very innovative!****I would definitely watch these actors again!****Lots of laughter, problem-solving and detective work.****The best thing I've ever been to at the library! So glad we came!****I loved how it was unexpected and we solved mysteries.****Entertaining and we learned some literary history!****Want to see it again! Congratulations!****I enjoyed it a lot, you are incredible actors.****I loved how we got to vote for what we wanted.****I liked there were 2 actors but 5 characters.**

THE KEEPERS

4

6 SHOWS
JUNE - JULY

286
AUDIENCE
MEMBERS



We received support from the Dorset Performing Arts fund this year to develop a new show, *The Keepers*. With the time and money available, we created an eye-catching lighthouse installation and devised a seaside improvised storytelling show.

Bea and Bill, two lighthouse keepers, have heard each others stories already, and are looking for new stories to keep them entertained as they stay awake all night keeping the lighthouse beams shining.

They invite visitors to write them a postcard with ideas for new seaside stories, and to post their cards in a lobster pot, so the Keepers can create brand new seaside stories inspired by ideas on the postcards.

In July we took pilot performances of *The Keepers* to a care home in Weymouth, to a community event in Knowle, south Bristol, and to Bristol's Harbour Festival.





In addition to the pilot shows of *The Keepers*, we remounted our tried and tested storytelling improv show, *Sticky Ends!* this summer for performances at *Forest of the Imagination* Bath, *Hardy Har!* Dorset Comedy Festival and *Labyrinth Festival* in Dorset.

Sticky Ends! is an energetic, funny and often surreal improv show that riffs of the form of cautionary tales. Its intention is to make an absolute mockery of the tradition of heavy moralising that regrettably can still feature in some children's theatre.

Stories in this tour included “*Don't Make Magic Potions With Mummy's Special Facecream*” and “*Don't Take Your Flamingo To School*”.



PUMPKINS

AND OTHER SPOOKY SEASON STORIES



**6 SHOWS
OCTOBER**

**273 AUDIENCE
MEMBERS**

Another tried and tested show that we've performed every October since 2018 is *Pumpkins!* We enjoyed a three-day run of this show at St Werburgh's City Farm in Bristol this year.

Disturbed that so many of their fellow pumpkins end up in bins every Halloween, they are on a mission to change hearts and minds and improve human/vegetable relations for all time.

Armed with a hand-drawn powerpoint, a ukulele and a really terrible poem, they will not rest until you take the pumpkin pledge and vow never again to throw a pumpkin in the bin. Free pumpkin recipe with every show!

We followed the *Pumpkins!* sketch with a halloween-themed improvised story based on audience confessions of silly, strange or unusual things they've been told not to do.

These included "Hang upside down on the sofa, put double-sided tape on the chairs or sit on my sister." I think we can all learn something from these.





We first sketched ideas for this show, the third in our trilogy of playable art detective shows for families back in the summer of 2023. We have spent more time on the show this year; researching, exploring, devising and writing.

Set (as the name implies) in Mexico, this show invites audiences to investigate a suspected case of forgery, leading them to learn more about the art of Frida Kahlo, her husband Diego Rivera and her friends and lovers Tina Modotti and Chavela Vargas.

We are delighted to be working once again with our good friend Isa Vargas, who first worked with us ten years ago playing Frida Kahlo in our show *The Paintstripper Monologues*. This time Isa will play a character called Agent Modotti. Agent Modotti & Agent Kahlo were once friends.

We took some photographs of Agents Modotti and Kahlo for use in the show. The compositions were inspired directly by historic photos of Frida Kahlo either with Tina Modotti, or taken by Tina Modotti, who was a very accomplished photographer.

Despite at time of writing, rehearsal funding being rather thin on the ground, we will be presenting pilot shows of *The Mexico Mission!* in community settings around Dorset in April 2025, with performances (but not rehearsals) supported by the Dorset Leisure Fund.





**13 WEEKS OF FREE
FAMILY ART ACTIVITY**

**4016 VIEWS ON
SOCIAL MEDIA**

The Company of International Artists: GIANT BRISTOL ART TRAIL MISSION
commissioned by Bristol City Centre Bristol Improvement District

We were commissioned as the Company of International Artists, our top secret international art detective agency, to hide a trail of inspiring artworks in various shops and venues in the central Bristol area between August and November.

We took care to find art that looked the part in all the different locations. For example there was pirate art in Treasure Island Sweet Shop, book illustration art in Second Page Bookshop and Matisse art under a Matisse quotation in Cass Art on Park Street.

Agents were invited to not only locate the artworks but could also download a free case file that helped them investigate the art more closely and also collect letters to unlock a password that gave a 20% discount on a Company of International Artists subscription.

Part of the commission was also for us to shoot short films in character as Agents Dali, Kahlo and Kinney (who is played by our assistant producer Aoife Beer) in each of the participating venues. These are still up on our @companyofinternationalartists instagram if you'd care to take a look.



Participating venues:
Second Hand Bookshop
Treasure Island Sweets
Japanicat
Stanfords Bookshop
Bristol Old Vic
Watershed
Hobgoblin Music
Bristol Folk House
Cass Art
Boston Tea Party



art students
al landscapes of
response was
English
melancholic, fens.

a lament for
e rural idyll he
captures in his
county that could
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Wiltshire Museums: Arts Award consultancy project

funded by Trinity College, Museum Development South West & Arts Council England

We have been awarded Trinity Champion Centre status every year since 2021 for our successful and innovative delivery of creative courses called Arts Award, which are a suite of nationally recognised qualifications accredited by Trinity College, London.

We were funded initially by Trinity College to provide a free morning of fact-finding for Wiltshire Museums about the simplest Arts Award course, called Arts Award Discover. Three museums attended the event in person at Chippenham Museum, with more attending online. One participant said of this event:

“I have never left a training session with such a clear idea of how I am going to move forward and implement what I had learnt!”

Subsequently, more funding was secured for us to work with three Wiltshire Museums;

Chippenham Museum
Crofton Beam Engines (Marlborough)
REME Museum (Lynham)

to give bespoke training on how these museums could deliver Arts Award Discover using their own collections between Nov 2024 - Jan 2025.



SPEAKING AT CONFERENCES and INDUSTRY MEETINGS

Our co-Artistic Director Gill was invited to speak at three conferences and industry meetings this year, which is the first time this has happened.

She was called to speak about her lived experience of the challenges that many working class artists face, particularly theatre artists, when operating in an industry that is dominated by those from more socio-economically privileged backgrounds.

She also spoke about how Brave Bold Drama attempts to overcome these challenges, and also how we strive to work ethically and equitably with working class communities.

Circus & Outdoor Arts Conversations



Gill Simmons

Artistic Director, Brave Bold Drama CIC

Circus & Outdoor Arts Conversations
Swindon, January



Family Arts Conference
Leeds Playhouse, February



BRISTOL & WEST OF ENGLAND BRANCH MEETING

Guest Speaker - Gill Simmons,
founder of theatre and community
arts company Brave Bold Drama,



TUESDAY 21 MAY 2024 - 7:30PM

on Zoom.

All members welcome.

EQUITY

**BRAVE
BOLD
DRAMA**
THEATRE & COMMUNITY ARTS

Gill Simmons (she/her)
Brave Bold Drama



Equity Union Branch Meeting
online, May



We ran an Explore level Arts Award course in devised theatre with 22 secondary students at Bridge Learning Campus in Hartcliffe, between January and May.

This course was part of a larger project coordinated by the Bristol Old Vic called Young Company City where youth groups from all over the city came together to present devised work on the Bristol Old Vic main stage. We created a show called *Supermarket!*

Final year students from Bristol University who were on work placement with us during the same period as this project contributed to the devising sessions at the school.

SUPERMARKET!

**PLAYING AT THE BRISTOL OLD VIC
SUNDAY 28TH APRIL 2024**

Take a brave step through the sliding doors of a supermarket where anything could happen.

Talking fridges, outraged bleach bottles and sniping fashion mannequins populate the shop floor, while the supermarket manager is unhealthily preoccupied with extraterrestrial conspiracy theories.

Oh yeah, and a bunch of big cats are planning a heist in the loading bay.

Devised by students from Bridge Learning Campus, Hartcliffe working in collaboration with Brave Bold Drama, *Supermarket!* is a celebration of the surreal and shines a proud light on the imaginative powers of the working class.

I enjoyed how innovative and inclusive our show was.

It was a great experience to perform with others in front of a big crowd.

I enjoyed the time I spent during the project we made countless memories and great stories we still laugh about when looking back. This project really gave me freedom of expression.

What I mostly achieved is finding the courage to go up on stage without freaking out which makes me really proud of myself.

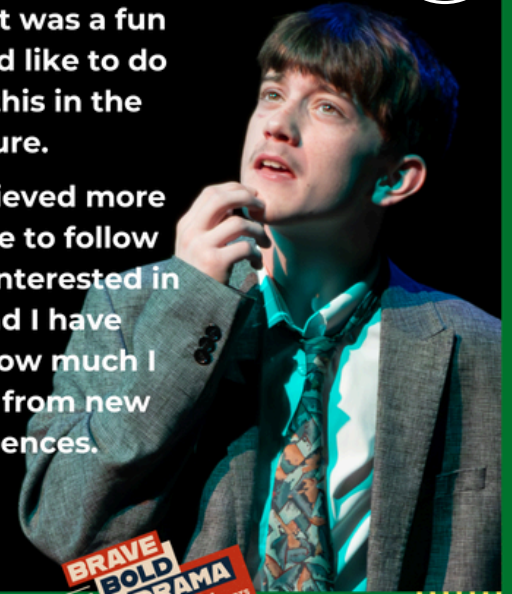
I hadn't ever done theatre before where you don't have a script to learn. It was easier because you just remember it in your head.



BRAVE BOLD DRAMA
THEATRE & COMMUNITY ARTS

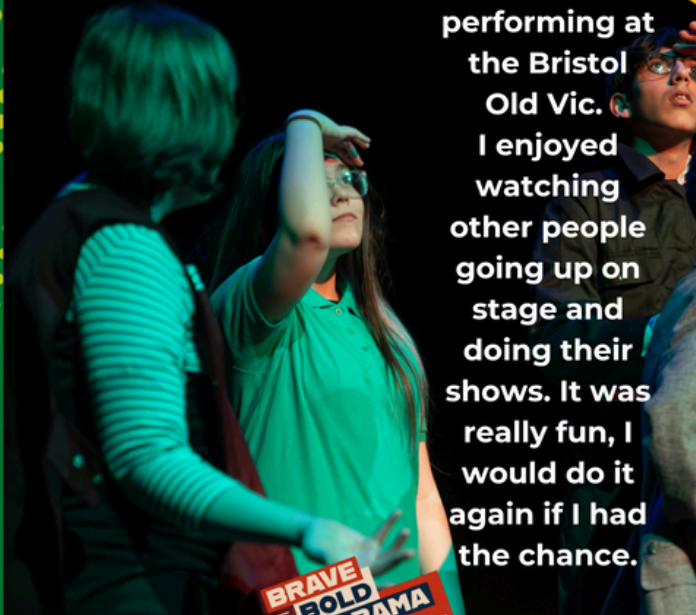
I enjoyed the crazy stories that we invented. It was a fun and I would like to do more of this in the future.

I feel I achieved more confidence to follow things I'm interested in now, and I have realised how much I can learn from new experiences.



BRAVE BOLD DRAMA
THEATRE & COMMUNITY ARTS

I enjoyed performing at the Bristol Old Vic. I enjoyed watching other people going up on stage and doing their shows. It was really fun, I would do it again if I had the chance.



BRAVE BOLD DRAMA
THEATRE & COMMUNITY ARTS

I enjoyed that we got to make the show ourselves. I also liked being able to show that I can act and be a confident speaker.



BRAVE BOLD DRAMA
THEATRE & COMMUNITY ARTS

I enjoyed having the creativity to choose the style and content of the performance.

I also enjoyed being able to speak to people I wouldn't usually through this project.



BRAVE BOLD DRAMA
THEATRE & COMMUNITY ARTS

I've learned not to be afraid, because before I was afraid of performing in front of lots of people, but now I've done it I feel proud and like I want to do it even more.



BRAVE BOLD DRAMA
THEATRE & COMMUNITY ARTS

Bridge Learning Campus Primary

We worked extensively in the spring and summer term with Bridge Learning Campus Primary, funded by Arts Council England and the National Grid Community Matters Fund.

In May we collaborated with local circus performer Ben Kirby, and 25 Year 4 & 5 students presented a showcase of circus skills to the young people's families.



In June we worked with 25 year 5 students as The Company of International Artists for a full day, resulting in them all gaining an Arts Award Discover qualification.



In July, we collaborated with Cat & Mouse Theatre Company, working in the playground together with sixty Year 6 students to improvise a film shoot in a project by Cat & Mouse called *Blockbuster Factory*. Regrettably we've no photos of this.



Also in July, we built our *Discovery Lab* spaceship in a classroom and worked with 150 students from Years 3 to 6 over a three day period.

The spaceship had made an unscheduled stop after running low on fuel, and the Earth Experts kindly offered to help refuel the spacecraft by working together to make some new scientific discoveries.

Because the spaceship isn't called The Discovery Lab for nothing. It's called that because it **RUNS ON DISCOVERIES!**

"We don't do enough of this...giving students an open-ended chance to just speculate and explore without telling them first what we're looking for. Really powerful stuff!"

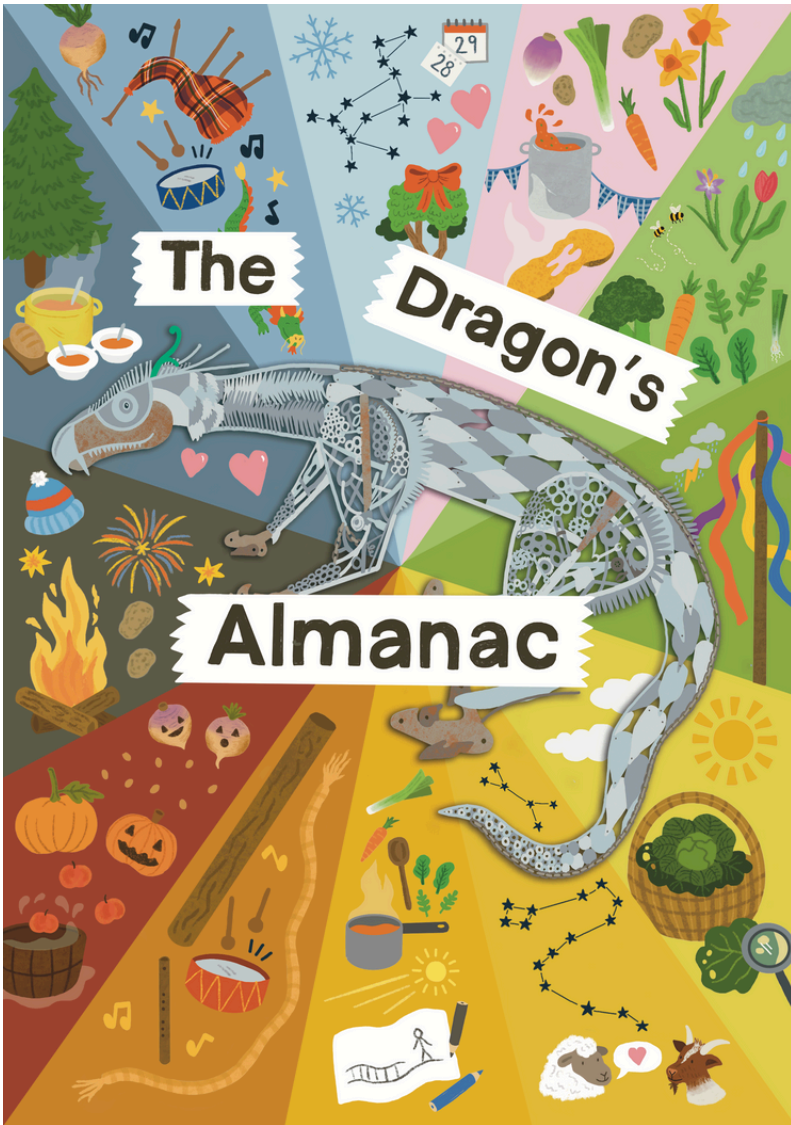
Year 6 teacher

"The Discovery Lab was a unique opportunity to engage with science in a hands-on and enjoyable way, using their scientific knowledge to investigate in diverse ways. It sparked their curiosity and encouraged critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Seeing the children's excitement and hearing their thoughtful and innovative observations highlighted the workshop's positive impact on their learning experience."

Year 4 teacher

(This Discovery Lab residency ended up as a solo alien affair, as the other succumbed to an Earthly disease and was obliged to rest.)





In July we published our second children’s book, which was written collaboratively with young children living locally to Hartcliffe City Farm in south Bristol

The book is inspired by a fantastic dragon sculpture who proudly guards the entrance to Hartcliffe City Farm, which was created by the Bristol-based Women Teaching Fabrication, so of course we held our free book launch in July at the farm in front of Jade herself!

The book is intended to be something families can dip in and out of, prompting many simple activities that will connect children with different cultures, the land and even the night sky as they “spend a year with a dragon”.

If you have a copy of the book, you can also download an accompanying colouring in and activity booklet as a place to capture children's responses to the book.

The Dragon's Almanac is illustrated by Liv Rose Whitfield.

Additional editing was mostly by Aoife Beer. This was funded by Arts Council England.

You can buy a copy of *The Dragon's Almanac*, along with many other excellent things, in our online shop: www.bravebolddrama.co.uk/shop

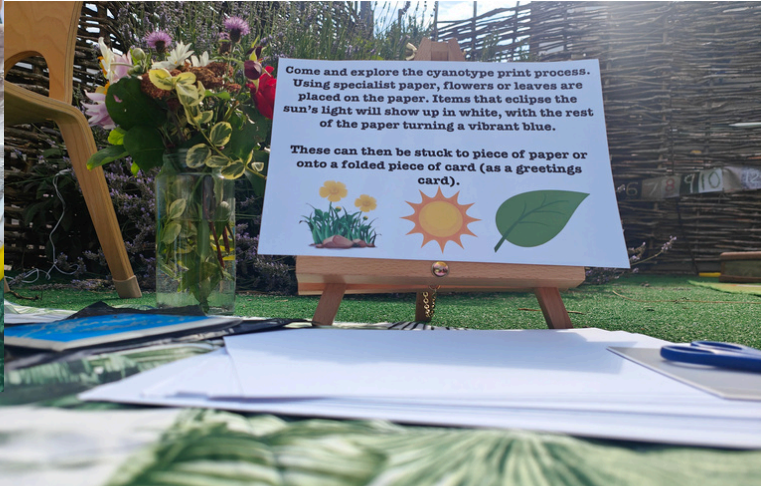
Early Years

Brave Bold Drama's first ever funded creative community work back in 2013 was imaginative themed creative play sessions in children's centres. These free sessions were capped due to space at 25 participants, and both were fully booked out.

It's been a while since we picked up this thread of work, but we were delighted to work twice this year with Southmead Children's Centre in north Bristol.



In the summer we helped young children and their grown-ups explore sunlight and shadow by making nature prints using special photosensitive paper.



And this Christmas we helped turn young children's drawings into an improvised sensory Christmas story.



Everyone was enchanted, from babies to grandmas! It was lovely the story was tailor-made for them. Everyone was smiling and singing. Thank you!" Participant feedback)



Costs and Values



our core costs are

£3,989

per year

That's just to meet necessary overheads of things like accountancy, public liability insurance and tour van insurance so we can continue to exist legally as a company.

We currently receive

£240

per year from regular supporters via online donations

The rest we have to find through sales from our online shop and getting venues to buy our shows and workshops on guaranteed fees.

We are unable to secure core grant funding because we are not a building-based company, and most grant funders are biased against us as we are not “established” enough. People only want to give security to “bricks and mortar”, not to people.

You can donate [HERE](#)



You can shop with us [HERE](#)



Our values

We are committed to making theatre that appeals to all ages, never patronises and that empowers and delights the audience.

We consciously make our shows so they can tour successfully to accessible community spaces like libraries, schools and parks as well as theatres.

We use our lived experience to ensure all our work is accessible especially for working class communities.

We are committed to being responsible, principled working class artists with the integrity to challenge working practices that exclude working class artists and to offer alternative ways of working to those prepared to listen.

We listen and respond to a community's needs and wishes in a way that is organic, flexible, imaginative, resourceful and fleet-of-foot.

We are committed to fair pay and conditions for other freelance artists we work with.

We are committed to fairly sharing our knowledge and skills by partnering with educational establishments, from early years settings through to universities.

We are curious about how we can purposefully apply creative technologies and use interactive storytelling forms to our work.

We are committed to making the arts more accessible for working class people both to work in and to enjoy.

COLLABORATORS PARTNERS and THANKS 2024

18



Artist Collaborators:

Chris Bullzini • Ben Kirby • Evan Lordan • Isa Vargas • Jayne Jackson • Liv Rose Whitfield

Partners:

Artz+ Dorset Council • Bridge Learning Campus • Bristol Folk House • Bristol Old Vic
Boston Tea Party • Cass Art • Cat & Mouse Theatre • Chippenham Museum
Crofton Beam Engines • Hartcliffe City Farm • Hobgoblin Music • In Jolly Good Company
Japonicat • REME Museum • Second Hand Bookshop • Stanfords Bookshop
St Werburgh's City Farm • Treasure Island Sweets • Pervasive Media Studios • Watershed

The Midnight Mission toured to:

Wimborne St Giles Village Hall • Weymouth College • Stalbridge Village Hall •
Swanage Library • Weymouth Library • Wimborne Library
Tobacco Factory Theatres • Shaftesbury Arts Centre

Heartfelt thanks to:

AOIFE BEER for her sterling work as our creative producer

CLAUDIA COLLINS for support with rehearsal space for *The Midnight Mission!*

RUTH HILL for her continued support as a volunteer director

MIKE KNIGHT for epic prop & set building skills

HUW & FELICITY LLEWELLYN for extremely generous hosting

JEN ROXBURGH for outstanding technical advice

JIE LIE, SAM PHILIPS, SOPHIA STADDON & JULIET WOLSLEY

our 2024 placement students from University of Bristol who supported
all the Company of International Artists film shoots we did this year
and also worked with us on *Supermarket!*

LIGHTHOUSE POOLE for a week's Sanctuary Residency on *The Keepers*

