

Big Imaginations Open Meeting: Big Diversity Debate

Date: Wednesday 23 March 2016

Location: STUN Studio, Z-arts, Manchester.

Chair: Liz O'Neill – CEO & Artistic Director of Z-arts

Speakers

Jonathan Kennedy – Associate Producer - Tara Arts.

Kimiko Mendl - Artistic Director - Yellow Earth theatre.

Garfield Allen – Director - STUN (Sustained Theatre Up North).

Trina Haldar – Artistic Director - Mashii Theatre.

Benji Reid - Freelance director.

Becky Lees – Creative Learning and Programme Manager, Stratford Circus.

Five learning points

Key points of discussion

- South Africa - leading example of minority arts with a culture of having trained BAME opera singers and the commonality of minority cultures having arts centres and communicating stories. This currently isn't mirrored in UK culture.
- Funding structure for programming 'diverse work' can be restrictive as they're often just one-off pots of funding and therefore not sustainable when looking to develop and support BAME companies and artists.
- The room unanimously acknowledged the presence of systemic racism in the UK and discussed the affect this has on all areas of the industry, from lack of opportunities for artists to the low percentage of BAME staff in the arts sector as a whole.
- Moving backwards? Political theatre which tackling big issues seems to be in decline, particularly in work for young audiences. To try and reverse this trend work should tour to community venues and reach audiences that usually wouldn't access the arts.
- Further to this, changes in dole/benefits have made it more difficult to survive as an actor, meaning the arts are increasingly becoming the reserve of the wealthier members of society.

Five things to focus on in the future.

- Send out artists and venue staff to talk to your communities in person
- Programme work that reflects the diversity of your audiences
- An artist of colour is for a whole year, not just for Black History Month
- Go out and see as much as possible.
- Unite with like-minded organisations and share knowledge, contacts and facilities.

"There is no quality without diversity"