



Annual Report 2020/2021

BIRDS OF PARADISE
THEATRE COMPANY



Introduction

For obvious reasons, this year was quite challenging for us as a company. The lockdown and closure of performing arts spaces meant that we had to cancel our production of **Don't Make Tea**, which was in development in early 2020 with an opening planned for autumn 2020. As a team we moved to only working online - and while we acclimatised to Zoom with relative ease allowing for a smooth continuation of work, we missed being in a room with each other.

As digital working became the norm, we began to plan ways we would use this new medium to connect and support people. One of our first projects of the year was the **Virtual Cuppa**; a weekly (it later became fortnightly) Zoom meeting open to anyone and everyone, where there was no objective - it was just a space for people to chat about whatever was on their mind, running 25 sessions. Another way we engaged people was by creating, **BOP on the Wire**, a digital podcast in which Artistic Director Robert Gale and board member Jack Hunter interviewed performers from past BOP productions.

In a pivot to everyone's planned programming, we were commissioned by **Battersea Arts Centre** to create a new digital performance, **Come To Bed with Me**, which was designed and devised specifically to use Zoom as the performance medium and ran for seven sold-out performances. We also produced **Something to Say**, a two phase project working to amplify seldom heard voices in radio dramas: in phase one we worked with **Theatre Gu Leòr** on a series of workshops on writing drama for radio; in phase two we ran an open call for commissions for three brand new fifteen-minute radio dramas. These radio dramas will be produced in spring 2021.

As part of BOP Development, we recruited a whole new cohort of **BOP Young Artists**, who will only work with BOP remotely, and alongside the existing young artists who spent much of 2020 working on a pioneering accessible online performance and exhibition space, **Locked World** - designed by and for disabled people.

We were not the only folk undertaking important work during this time, and where possible, we worked in partnership with other organisations on projects that aligned with BOP's own vision.

Over this period of lockdown and pandemic response we:

Supported **Take Me Somewhere** on their project **Somewhere to Talk**, which offered a cash bursary and one-to-one, hour-long, remote coaching sessions for artists working within performance in Scotland.

Participated in the **Federation of Scottish Theatre's** series of working groups looking at strategy development for the sector.

Worked with **Playwright's Studio Scotland** to deliver a version of their playwrights mentoring initiative, specifically focussed on disabled playwrights

Signed up to the **Parent in the Performing Arts** charter and were invited to speak at PIPA events.

Worked with **Fuel Theatre** on the **Freelance Task Force**, recruiting disabled artist San Alland to work with multiple disabled freelancers in Scotland. San's work culminated in **A Wake**, a collective ritual and discussion event for which San commissioned eight artists to contribute a five minute piece on grief or loss - read about San's work in more detail [here](#).

Supported campaign **We Shall Not Be Removed**, an intersectional UK Disability Arts Alliance formed to ensure a sustainable future for disability and inclusive arts. Naturally we enthusiastically contributed to the many meetings and events, and even assisted by convening one of the meetings.

2020/21 Snapshot

BOP Theatre

Commissioned to create Come To Bed With Me, a brand new digital performance for Battersea Arts Centre. Commissioned to co-write Ian and Sheena, a short film that featured as part of National Theatre of Scotland's Scenes for Survival series. Our AD Robert Softley Gale wrote a scene for NTS's **Ghostlight film**, based on some characters from My Left/Right Foot.

BOP Development

Worked with multiple disabled people, young and older, through: BOP Young Artists; BOP Young Artists (digital); Sensing Stories; Something to Say; Playwrights' Studio Scotland & Birds of Paradise Mentoring Award.

BOP Strategic

Recruited three researchers to begin work on our Relaxed performance research project House Lights Up. Delivered Make it Accessible, five online public events featuring twenty guest presenters and over 200 attendees. Reworked our Disability Equality Training presentation for online delivery. Were recruited by the British Council to create an accessible events planning document, and by the British Council Mexico to act as accessibility consultants on Innovation for Culture.

At A Glance

450

people engaging in creative events

55

disabled artists engaging in creative, development and strategic projects

59

artists employed across creative, development and strategic projects

355

people engaging in non-creative events

62

people worked with across five training and consultation events

28,833

boptheatre.co.uk web page views

BOP Theatre

Come To Bed With Me

Created by **Robert Softley Gale**, **Rachel Drazek** and **Mairi Taylor**
Original music by **Scott Twynholm**
Produced by **Birds of Paradise** and **Battersea Arts Centre**

A brand new production for the age of limited public events, Come To Bed With Me takes BOP into digital and durational territory that is new for the company. This performance is intimate and private, exploring territory that resonates with us all just now as we navigate the world from our homes.

Robert is a disabled performer - he is used to being looked at and to being asked all sorts of questions. This show was an invitation to share in moments that are new and real - to exchange with people who might not look or move as you do.

Find out more about the show please click [here](#)

7 online performances
26 October - 1 November, 9 - 10pm



“When you go to bed without someone else there it’s just you, which is what Come To Bed With Us (sic) is about: you and your body and your thoughts. This is a considered, careful study of all three, and it wouldn’t work without you as part of it, even doing nothing, just being where and what you are.”

- Frey Kwa Hawking - Exeunt Magazine

COME TO BED WITH ME

Ian and Sheena

Produced by National Theatre of Scotland, in association with BBC Scotland, Screen Scotland, BBC Arts' Culture in Quarantine project and Birds of Paradise Theatre Company, with support from Hopscotch Films.

We were asked to contribute to the National Theatre of Scotland's 'Scenes for Survival' project, and we thought who better to hear from during this time than Ian and Sheena, from our 2018 production My Left Right Foot - The Musical.

The resulting film is available to watch at the link below.

Richard Conlon and Gail Watson co-write and star alongside Natalie MacDonald in a lively follow-up to the smash hit satire My Left Right Foot: The Musical from writer/director Robert Softley Gale.

To watch the film please click [here](#).



BOP on the Wire

This was a brand new podcast series hosted by **Robert** and disabled actor and stand-up comedian, and BOP board member, **Jack Hunter**.

In each episode they spoke with a performer from a past BOP production.

Think of it like the Graham Norton Show but with more disabled people and without a jazzy sofa.

The four interviewees are:

Laurence Clark

Gail Watson

Caroline Parker

Amy Conachan



You can listen to the series via your preferred podcast platform, or by clicking [here](#).

BOP Development

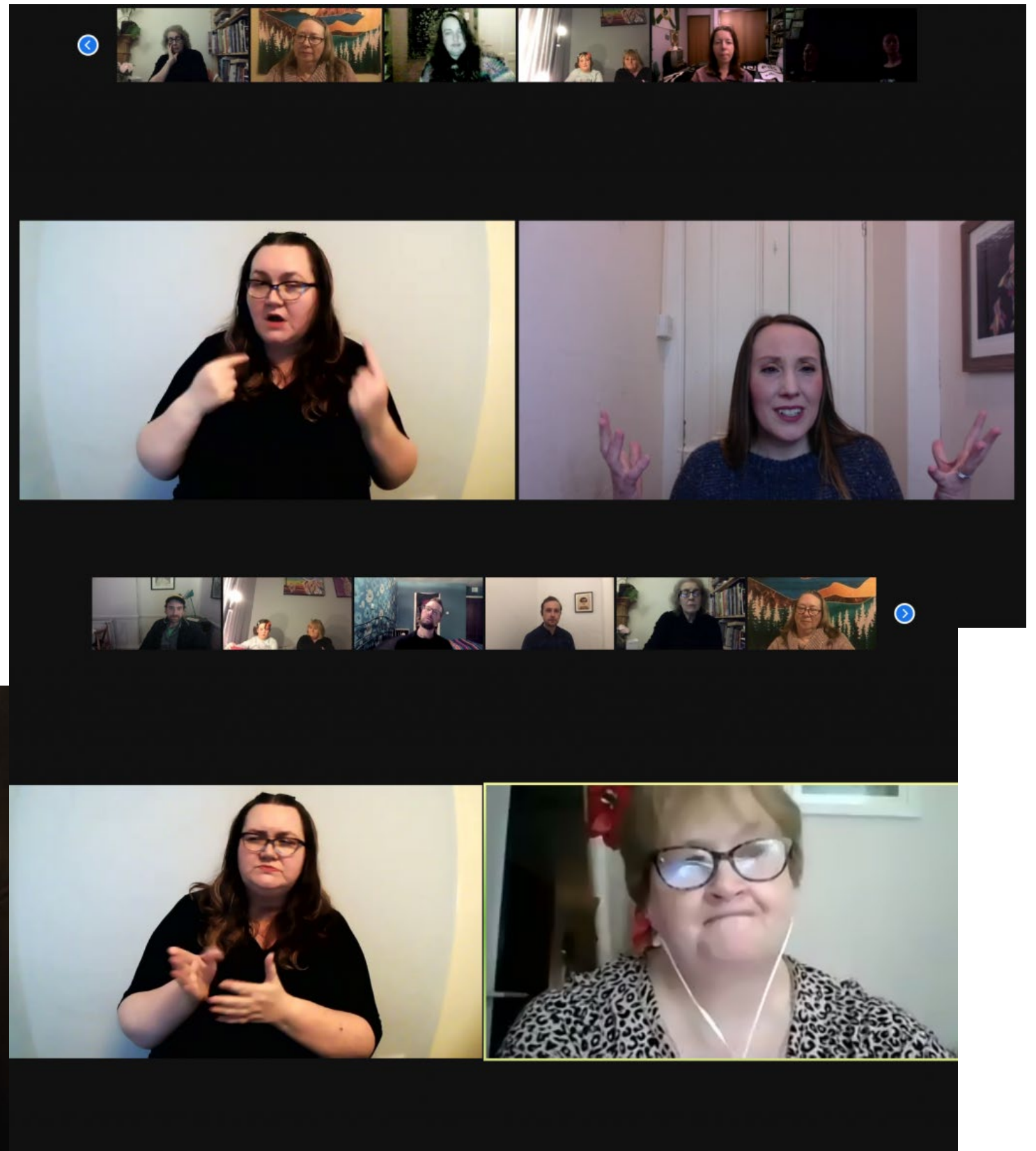
Sensing Stories

Delivered in partnership with the **Scottish International Storytelling Festival**.

This was an artistic development opportunity in which we worked with four disabled people, with no previous experience, to develop storytelling skills and share their stories in a live setting.

Through a series of workshops with professional storyteller Dougie Mackay, participants learned some simple storytelling skills, gained confidence in public speaking and began to develop their own stories for a live public performance over Zoom.

To find out more about this project please click [here](#).



“I wish I’d been able to explore more immersive elements of storytelling but I’m happy with what I learnt considering working remotely.”

- Sensing Stories participant



Something to Say | Rudeigin ri Ràdh (Development)

Delivered with **Theatre Gu Leòr**

This project happened in two phases: writer development; writer commissioning.

Development

For the writer development phase we worked with Theatre Gu Leòr to offer training workshops in the specific skills for writing for radio. The aim of these workshops was to amplify the voices of those less heard from in radio: Gaelic people and Disabled people.

These workshops have included sessions with radio playwright Olly Emanuel, voice actor Garry Robson, sound engineer Heather Andrews and BOP's Robert Softley Gale.

We worked with five disabled writers who received training in writing for radio, understanding the technical aspects of recording and how to authentically write disabled characters.

Commissioning

For the writer commissioning phase we sought three brand new radio plays, written by disabled writers. This was done via an open call, for which received 21 pitches.

The criteria of the call out were:

- The play must be fifteen minutes
- The play must be a monologue or a duologue
- Writers had to have a track record of creative writing (but this could be in any field)
- Writers had to identify as disabled

We received 21 pitch ideas from writers and from that we selected three successful plays:



Bronagh & the Bum Goblin by Aine King



The Premorial by Jen McGregor



Jammed by Gabriella Sloss

The three plays began initial development in February 2021 and will continue development and move into production in the year 2021/2022. The final productions will be broadcast via Edinburgh based community radio station EHFM.

To find out more, please click [here](#).

Playwrights' Studio Scotland & Birds of Paradise Mentoring Award

We teamed up with Playwrights' Studio Scotland to deliver a version of their regular Mentoring Award to two disabled writers. There was a very competitive selection process but the two writers selected were Emily Ingram and Jack Hunter.

As part of the opportunity they each received: a £2000 cash bursary; four skills workshops; community building opportunities; a cultural trip. Additionally they were set up with an industry professional who gave mentoring over a period of 6 1 to 1 sessions. Jack was partnered with writer Kieran Hurley, Emily was partnered with Nicola McCartney.

Find out more about this opportunity please click [here](#).

BOP Young Artists

The pilot cohort of BOP Young Artists were due to move on from the project in April 2020. However, due to the pandemic, it felt only right to continue supporting these artists throughout this time.

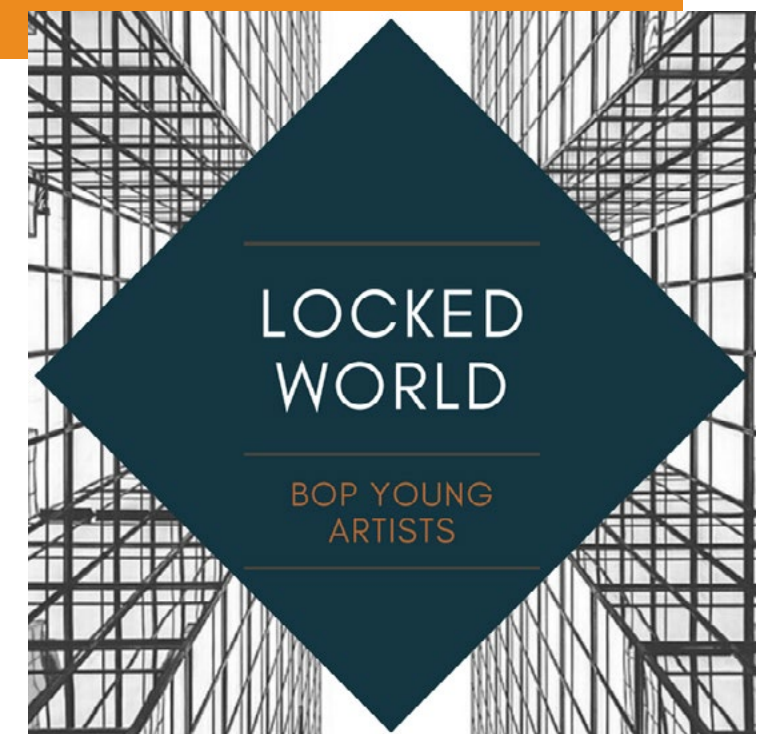
Locked World

The cohort did a 'digital pivot', exploring how they could take their live in-person production 'Locked World' into a digital space.

With consultation from Creative Scotland's Digital Pivot programme lead [Suzy Glass](#) (see report [here](#)) and Live Performance / Virtual Reality Director [Leonie Rae-Gasson](#), guided by BOPs Development Officer Morna McGeoch, Locked World developed into a radically accessible digital platform for showcasing the work of emerging disabled artists.

BOP has since begun working with web design and development company [Design and Code](#) to make Locked World a reality - this innovative accessible website will be ready to launch later this year.

To find out more about Locked World, please click [here](#).



BOP Young Artists (digital)

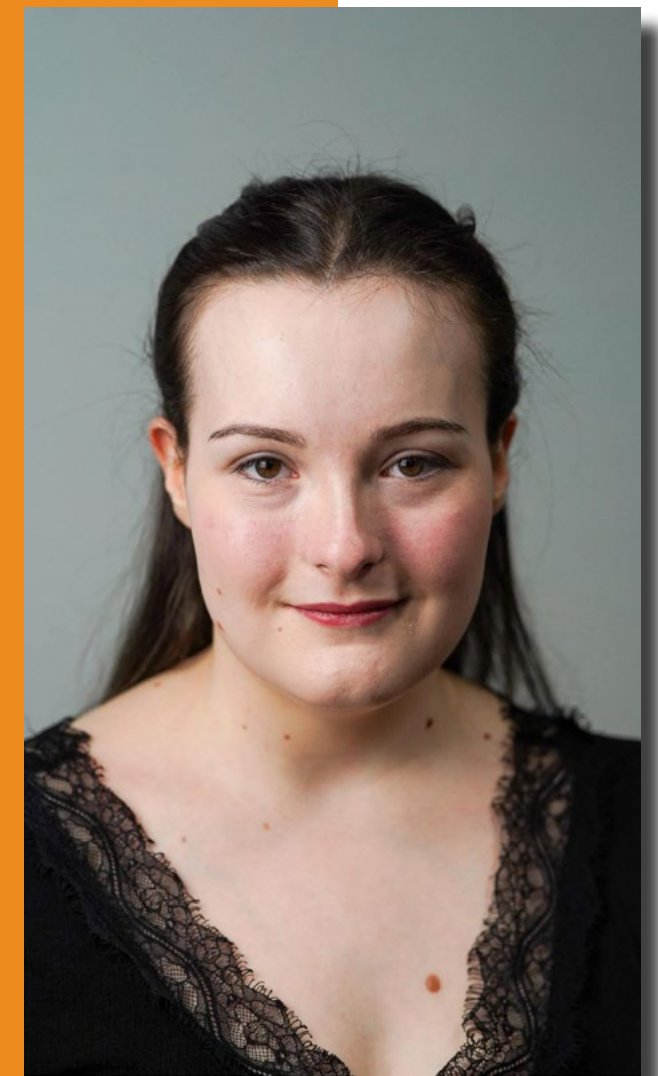
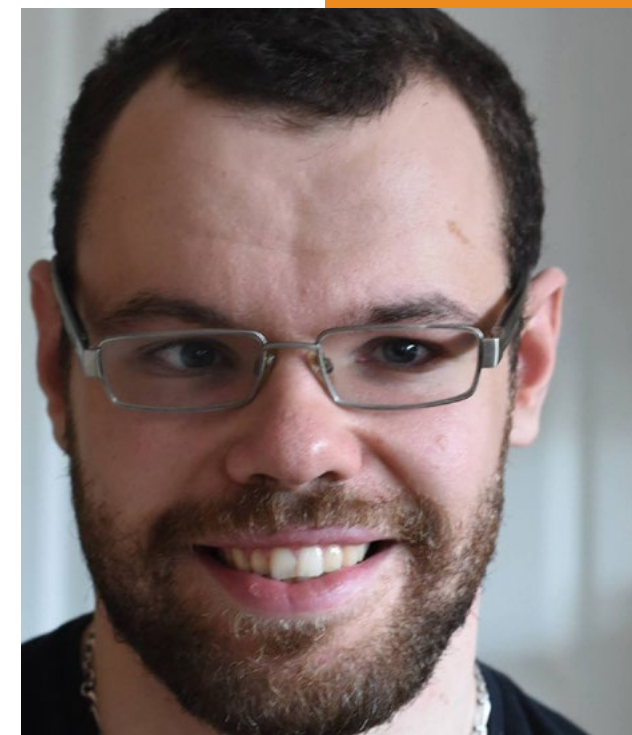
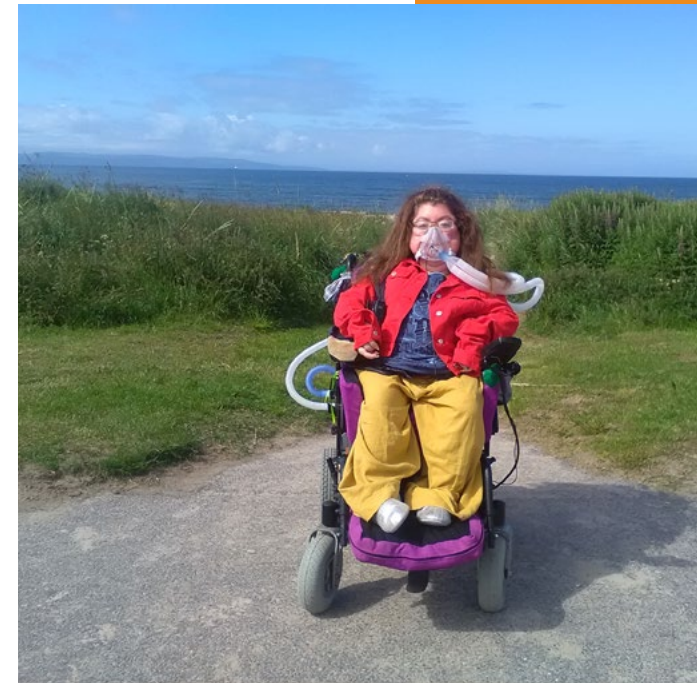
In July 2020, we decided to recruit a second cohort of young artists to work with us remotely. These 5 young artists are based in rural areas across Scotland, including Inverness and Hawick.

These young artists have each identified individual artistic goals, and taken part in 21 online creative workshops.

These have included:

- Approaches to Writing Creatively Embedded Access, with Robert Softley-Gale
- Approaches to Writing Adaptations, with Rosie Kellagher
- Approaches to Writing Autobiographical Work, with Matilda Ibini
- Approaches to New Writing, with May Sumbwanyambe
- The Writer and The Dramaturg, with Alyson Woodhouse
- The Writer and The Performer, with Ellen Renton
- The Writer and The Designer, with Ali MacLaurin
- The Writer and The Director, with Rachel Bagshaw

To find out more please click [here](#)



BOP Strategic

Make it Accessible

Delivered with Andy Edwards

This project was a series of five online talks, with an aim of sharing knowledge around how creatives and industry professionals can improve the accessibility of their own work. Each talk was hosted by Andy Edwards and someone from BOP, and was a two hour Zoom event featuring presentations from twenty different artists or companies. After the first Make it Accessible event, the contents for the subsequent events were decided by feedback from people who attended.



For more information about each of the events, including recordings of the talks, and a summary film that consider the impact of the series as a whole - click [here](#)

The full list of MIA events is:

- Make it Accessible
- Case Studies
- What is a Relaxed Performance?
- Finding your Audience
- Beyond Scotland



“Just wanted to say I think the work you’re doing here is really vital and that it’s very much appreciated. We’re finding it really tricky to have lost so much contact from pals and the sector at large, so the opportunity to hear from people on a key subject at a critical time feels really important.”

- Talk Attendee

Access Scottish Theatre

As performance spaces were closed and productions were cancelled, the Access Scottish Theatre guide was put on pause until the return of live theatre was possible.

During this hiatus, we started working on **House Lights Up: Researching Relaxed Performances for Neurodiverse Audiences in Scotland**, a research project that considers what the performing arts industry in Scotland can do to make Relaxed Performances more accessible for audiences to attend.

The research is being conducted by Aby Watson, Thom Scullion and Zoe Halliday, who have now completed the research phase and are working on the analysis of the findings.

We plan to share the findings in 2022.

To find out more please click [here](#)



Aby Watson



Thom Scullion



Zoe Halliday



Training & Consultation

Lockdown interfered with our usual opportunities to deliver Disability Equality Training sessions in person, so we instead took the time to look at our DET package, ensure that it was up to standard content wise, and to redevelop the presentation to make the training package possible to deliver on Zoom.

The organisations we delivered training for during this time are Creative Edinburgh, Glasgow Connected Arts Network and The Beacon Arts Centre.

During this period, we completed two contracts with the British Council:

The first was undertaking a piece of work to create a document that will help British Council employees across the world plan events in an accessible way.

The Events and Visits Disability Inclusion Toolkit and Resources contained many different aspects including:

- Events and Visits Disability Inclusion Toolkit
- Events and Visits Inclusion Planner
- Venue Checklist
- Visitor Information Form
- Travel & Accommodation Form.

The second was working as accessibility consultants on the project Innovation for Culture, a live policy co-design project publically run by British Council Mexico and Cultura Jalisco, with an aim of shaping new cultural policy for the Mexican state of Jalisco.

To find out more please click [here](#)

Youth Arts Consultants

The YACs started the year by planning to deliver an event around accessibility as part of Youth Theatre Arts Scotland's National Convention of Youth Drama, but unfortunately this had to be cancelled.

While opportunities for them to work were limited, they completed an access audit of Platform's website and they were invited to deliver some Disability Equality Training to a group of young artists from Scottish Youth Theatre.

To find out more please click [here](#)

Book Club

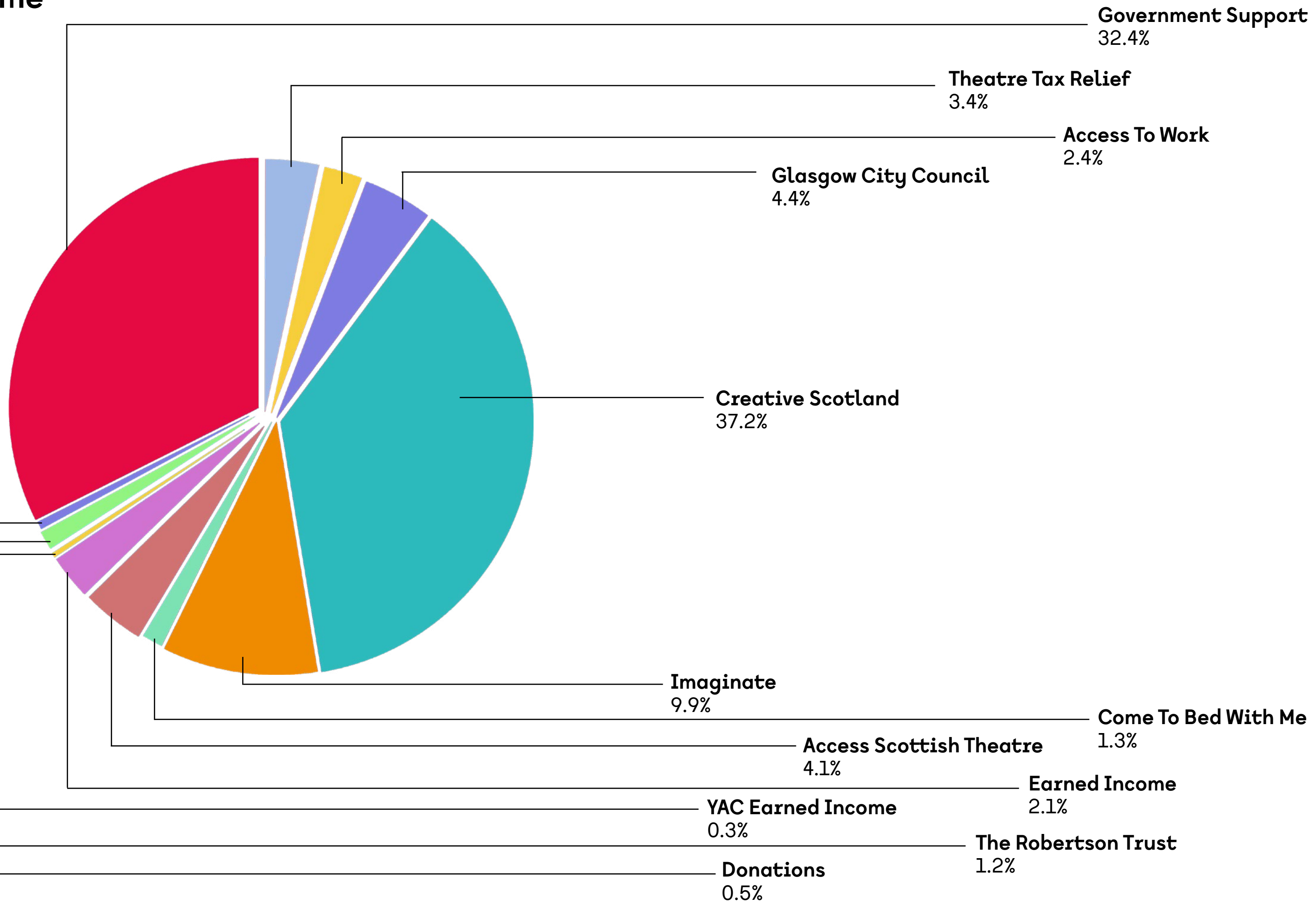
After the initial interest in our Virtual Cuppa events we wanted to build on the desire for a digital community. So, in December 2020 we launched an online book club.

We published a list of six books, fiction and nonfiction, but each to do with disability. The book club met on the last Tuesday of every month and ran from Jan - Jun 2021.

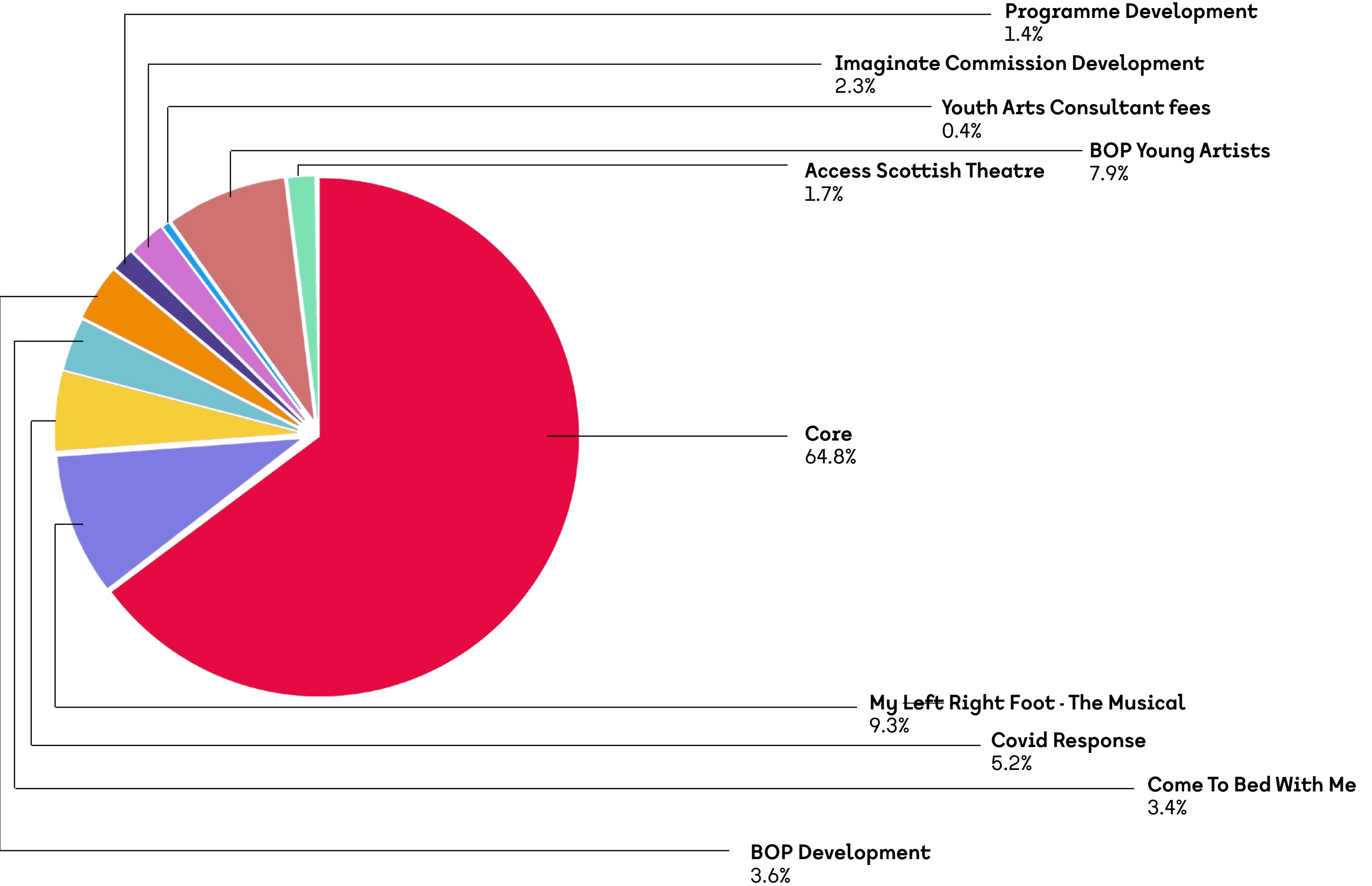
To find out more please click [here](#)



Income



Expenditure





Staff 2020/21

Robert Gale: CEO & Artistic Director
 Mairi Taylor: Executive Producer
 Michelle Rolfe: Producer
 Callum Madge: Engagement Manager
 Morna McGeoch: Development Officer

Image: The YACs attend an Activism in Youth Arts event in London a few weeks before lockdown. Banner reads: Not Your F***ing Inspiration.

Board 2020/21

Miles Harrison: Chair
 Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambaksh: Vice Chair (retiring)
 Simon Hodgson: Treasurer
 Amy Conachan
 Jai Hutchison
 Joy Parkinson
 Dr Ksenija Horvat
 Jack Hunter

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