



BIRDS OF PARADISE
THEATRE COMPANY

Annual Report
2021/22

Introduction

This was an exciting and challenging year for Birds of Paradise as we, alongside the wider arts sector, continued to adapt and react to working within a pandemic. As complete lockdown eased, the company was able to meet and work in certain professional contexts and we learnt new ways of creating and making work that were safe for everyone involved.

Over the course of this year the company was exposed to new creative challenges and partnerships that took it away from our traditional theatre practices. For instance, our commission for **Imaginate**, Super Special Disability Roadshow, was reimagined as a film to meet the needs of the **Edinburgh International Children's Festival**, available to stream to schools and other audiences in three accessible versions. We discovered that new forms could mean new audiences as it went out to other corners of the world in both arts festival and education settings.

We also focussed as much as possible on opportunities for disabled artists and launched two specific commission strands. Three disabled writers were commissioned as part of **Something to Say**, which produced three brand new radio plays broadcast on Edinburgh-based community radio station, **EHFM**. A future three new accessible digital works were commissioned as part of our pioneering digital exhibition space **Locked World** (launching in 2023).

BOP Young Artists continued to meet online for development sessions and to work on different projects including supporting the development of **Locked World** which was a key outcome of the pioneering cohort. This year we also established a third BOP Young Artists cohort specifically to reach young disabled people of colour, who may face intersecting and complex barriers when exploring an interest in the arts.

Partnership work remained a strong focus and during this year included work with **Playwright's Studio Scotland**, on the Disabled Playwright Mentoring Award, and with **Scottish Storytelling Centre**, with **Sensing Stories**. We also worked with the newly formed **Sanctuary Queer Arts** on their Mini Writing Commission.

Our strategic work in the UK continued to adapt to deliver training and consultation sessions online to a high number of organisations. This remote way of working allowed us to deliver training and consultation work with British Council Mexico which expanded to include further work in Peru and Venezuela.

So while we began this year feeling reduced in our capacity to deliver and create, by the end of the year new methods, forms and models of working and making brought BOP to global audiences and solidified relationships around the world.



2021/22 Snapshot

BOP Theatre

Commissioned to create Super Special Disability Roadshow for Edinburgh International Children's Festival. Commissioned three disabled writers to three short radio plays, broadcast on Edinburgh based community radio station EHFM.

BOP Development

Worked with multiple disabled people, young and older, through: BOP Young Artists; Locked World; Sensing Stories; Something to Say; Playwrights' Studio Scotland & Birds of Paradise Mentoring Award; Sonando in Silence; BOP Book Club

BOP Strategic

Continued work on our research project in Relaxed performances, House Lights Up; Worked with the British Council in Mexico, Peru and Venezuela - delivery disability equality training and consultancy, and curating a showcase of digital work made by UK based disabled artists to be screened across the three countries; delivered Disability Equality Training to organisations including Battersea Arts Centre and Bernat Klein Foundation; supported Youth Arts Consultants to deliver workshops with Youth Theatre Arts Scotland.

At A Glance

1500

people engaging
in creative events



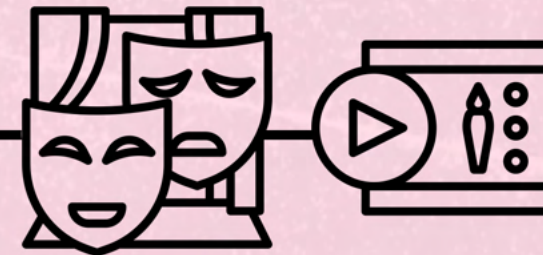
30 +

Disabled artists
engaging in
creative,
development and
strategic projects



34

artists employed
across creative,
development and
strategic projects



259

people
engaged across

62

training sessions
and consultation
projects



29,604

boptheatre.co.uk
web page views



5

number of countries
BOP worked in

Scotland, New Zealand,
Mexico, Peru, Venezuela



BOP THEATRE: **Super Special Disability Roadshow**

Written by Robert Softley Gale

Directed by Joe Douglas

Original songs by Sally Clay

Commissioned by Imagine for the Edinburgh International Children's Festival

Screened as part of:

- Edinburgh International Children's Festival, UK – May 2021
- Sin Limites, Peru (from Gran Teatro Nacional Peru & British Council) – Dec 2021
- Auckland Arts Festival, New Zealand – Mar 2022

Drawing on stories and experiences of disabled children and adults, SSDR explored what it means to be disabled and how different generations feel about their identities, with characteristic BOP humour, heart and honesty. The film was made accessible with BSL, Audio Described and captioned versions and is also available for ongoing touring as a live in theatre.

SSDR rehearsed and filmed in Glasgow in early 2021 and as this was the first time that BOP created a work specifically for screen we contracted Urban Bothy. Themes in the work were developed into resources for families and schools and these were distributed and adapted for different markets. The film was translated and captioned for use by the British Council in Peru, in particular for a project reaching schools across the country, and would go on to be used in an educational context in Mexico and Venezuela.

For more information please visit [here](#).



Super Special Disability Roadshow: Stills of the filming. Photo by Niall Walker

“A collision of memories, bickering, songs, animations, jokes and serious commentary.”

Mark Fisher - The Guardian ★★★★★

“[An] exploration of the changing politics of disability.”

Joyce MacMillan - The Scotsman ★★★★★

“Smart, funny and nuanced online show exploring lived experiences of disability.”

Thom Dibdin - The Stage ★★★★★

Super Special Disability Roadshow: Filming behind the scenes. Photos by Katerina Barvirova



Something to Say

Produced by Birds of Paradise, in association with Perth Theatre.
And with EHFM as broadcast partner.

During 2020, we ran a development project in partnership with Theatre Gu Leor, called **Something to Say | Rudeigin ri Ràdh**, to amplify the voices of people seldom heard in radio drama. This project was divided into two strands: Writer Development; Writer Commissions.

For the Writer Commissions strand, we commissioned three brand new 15 minute radio plays, written by disabled writers. These plays were:

- The Premorial by Jen McGregor
- Jammed by Gabriella Sloss
- Bronagh and the Bum Goblin by Áine King

As development of the play scripts took place throughout 2021, we realised that one of the threads connecting each story was that they were each about characters with hidden disabilities. This felt particularly relevant, because Something to Say was conceived as a development opportunity aiming to give visibility to disabled writers and characters.

The three radio plays were broadcast on EHFM as a single programme, Monday 15th – Friday 19th November 2021. The plays are still available to listen to via our website.

For more information please visit [here](#).

“Of course, the impact IBD can have on our lives is about more than toilets. It’s far-reaching and complex, and impossible to convey in a short audio play. I wanted the play to be not just about what IBD is, and what it does to us physically, but also what living with it does to us emotionally.

Writing comedy about something as serious as IBD is a bit risky. I’m not making light of other people’s painful experiences with chronic illness. Rather, I wanted to raise awareness about IBD and celebrate the resilience of those coping with it. Humour is a life-belt that we throw to each other – or to ourselves – so we don’t go under in a crisis. There’s something profoundly human about laughing at our own worst moments. It’s healthy.

(Áine King)



Original artworks by
Celine Mcilmun



BOP DEVELOPMENT: BOP Young Artists

Our artist development programme had its third intake this year, working specifically with disabled young creatives from mixed heritage backgrounds. The four artists selected are: **Mariam Chaudhry, Lloyd Darko, Cleopatra Gabriel** and **Rahul Mehmi**.

This group of young people have undertaken workshops with Development Officer Morna McGeoch and theatre-maker Niloo-Far Khan around their career ambitions and creative identities- setting goals for themselves, and beginning to develop a digital mixed media album as part of the BOP Young Artists' project Locked World.

This year BOP Young Artists (Digital) engaged in a screenwriting project for Locked World, where they collaboratively wrote and produced the short film

“
I would describe myself as a poet, scriptwriter and artist and I now feel much more confident about defining myself as those things than I did before participating in BOP-YA. I feel that this project has helped me form more of an identity as an artist.

BOP Young Artists (Digital) participant

To find out more about BOP Young Artists please [click here](#).

Locked World

Our BOP Young Artists have been exceptionally busy creating content for our new digital arts platform Locked World.

With digital expertise from award-winning agency Design and Code and disability equality expertise from BOP, Locked World takes a pioneering approach to digital accessibility - creatively embedding access into the user experience, rather than either hiding it away ashamedly in the 'back-end' or adding it on right at the end in the form of a shiny 'widget'.

Following an open call for proposals, we commissioned three disabled artists to create brand new pieces of work for Locked World alongside works by existing BOP Young Artists.

The following works resulted:

'untitled autism manual'

sound and film piece by Rylan Gleave.

'I want it for us, and I also want it from us'

video and poetry work by Georgia Holman.

'Writing From the Groin, or / and: How Non-disabled CisHet Monied White People Lock Themselves into Mediocrity'

experimental essay by Sandra Alland.

We would like to thank our panel of access consultants for Locked World: play expert Max Alexander, audio description specialist Juliana Capes, Trudi Collier from Solar Bear, actor Amy Helena, participatory artist and access consultant Sorcha Pringle.



For more information
about Locked World,
[click here](#).

Sensing Stories

Delivered in partnership with the Scottish International Storytelling Festival

Returning for a second year Sensing Stories was an artistic development opportunity for 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 Gauri Raje, 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.

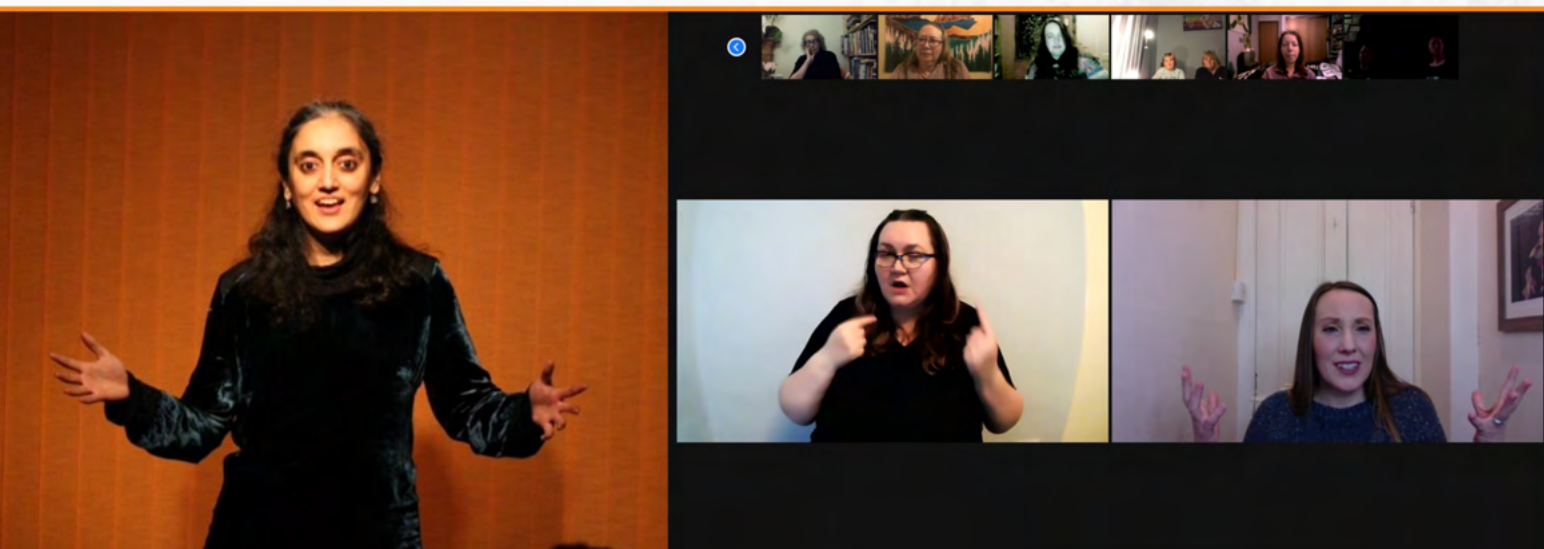
“

I liked writing my story like a fairytale.

(Sensing Stories participant)

”

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



Playwrights' Studio Scotland & Birds of Paradise Mentoring Award

After the success of the first partnership between BOP and Playwright' Studio Scotland, we were delighted when the PSS team asked if we would like to run the initiative for a second year. The initiative pairs a disabled playwright in the early stage of their career, with a professional playwright. After a competitive selection process, the disabled writer selected for mentorship was Joe Brown.

As part of the opportunity Joe received: a £2000 cash bursary; four skills workshops; community building opportunities; a cultural trip. This is in addition to multiple 1:1 sessions with professional playwright Philly McMahon.

“

This was an amazing opportunity. This award has given me the guidance and support I needed to continue my work as a new playwright and find my feet within the theatre scene as a writer. I loved that, at its core, this program was inclusive, accessible and bespoke to what I needed as a new playwright. This award stays true to the very aims and strengths of Birds of Paradise Theatre Company: helping create theatre and nurturing diverse artists. Keeping diversity and inclusion at the forefront of all of their projects and programs.

(Joe Brown)

”

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

Book Club

As the lockdown continued into 2021, we felt it was important to find ways to facilitate people being able to connect and spend time together. One of these ways was our Book Club. Launched in December 2020, we published a list of six books to do with disability; fiction and nonfiction. We then met on the last Tuesday of every month, to discuss that month's book. The Book Club ran from January - June 2021.

“It's like coming home to my own people, spending time with other disabled people who enjoy reading and having a good blether about disability issues. Some very insightful comments which I'm still mulling over and thinking about how they impact on my creative work.”

(Book Club attendee)

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

Mini Writing Commission

From Sanctuary Queer Arts, supported by Birds of Paradise

Sanctuary Queer Arts offered a writing commission to D/deaf and/or Disabled LGBTQIA+ artists, and BOP supported the project with mentoring from our Artistic Director, Robert Softley Gale. The selected artist was Luke (Luca) Cockayne.

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

Soñando in Silence

Supported by a British Council Unlimited Micro Award

Spanish: Soñando / English: Dreaming

Soñando in Silence was an exploration of practice between artists in Mexico and Scotland. Taking as a starting the practice of Mexican artist Sofia Olmos, Scottish artist Jamie Rae and BOP entered a period of research and reflection with Sofia to develop new modes of theatrical experience, to immerse the audience in a performance to interrogate and elucidate held notions of what it is to be D/deaf.

Sofia and Jamie will dream in silence.

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



BOP STRATEGIC: Access Scottish Theatre

Produced by BOP, on behalf of Federation of Scottish Theatre. Funded by Creative Scotland.

With the continuation of the national lockdown into 2021, theatres and other venues remained closed or only produced a very limited number of performances. This meant that the hiatus on the printed guide continued, although information about performances was available online.

By 2022 however, it was fantastic to have venues planning for their reopening, and for January 2022, we produced the first printed guide since 2020, albeit a slimmed down version.

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

House Lights Up

Produced by BOP, on behalf of Federation of Scottish Theatre. Funded by Creative Scotland.

House Lights Up is a research project looking into how the experience of Relaxed performances by neurodivergent audiences in Scotland, could be improved.

In 2020/21 we recruited neurodivergent researchers and artists Aby Watson, Thom Scullion and Zoe Halliday, who conducted research into perspectives of audiences and industry professionals. The analysis of the research continued throughout 2021/22, and the finished report will be published in 2023.

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

Training & Consultation

After having adapted our Disability Equality Training for online delivery in 2020, we continued delivering training sessions for organisations across 2021/22. These organisations were: Renfrewshire Leisure; Federation of Scottish Theatre; Cove Park; Battersea Arts Centre; Summerhall; Dance Base; Bernat Klein Foundation.

In this period BOP worked on two tenders with the British Council in Mexico. The first was to act as the EDI Adviser on the cultural policy development project Innovation for Culture and the second was to deliver an extensive package of training and consultation support as part of the DASH programme - Disability Arts Showcase South America. The DASH work also extended into Peru and Venezuela in early 2022.

The work with these groups consisted of extended Disability Equality Training and consultancy, using the knowledge of the local partners to make sure that the work was relevant to each country.

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

Youth Arts Consultants

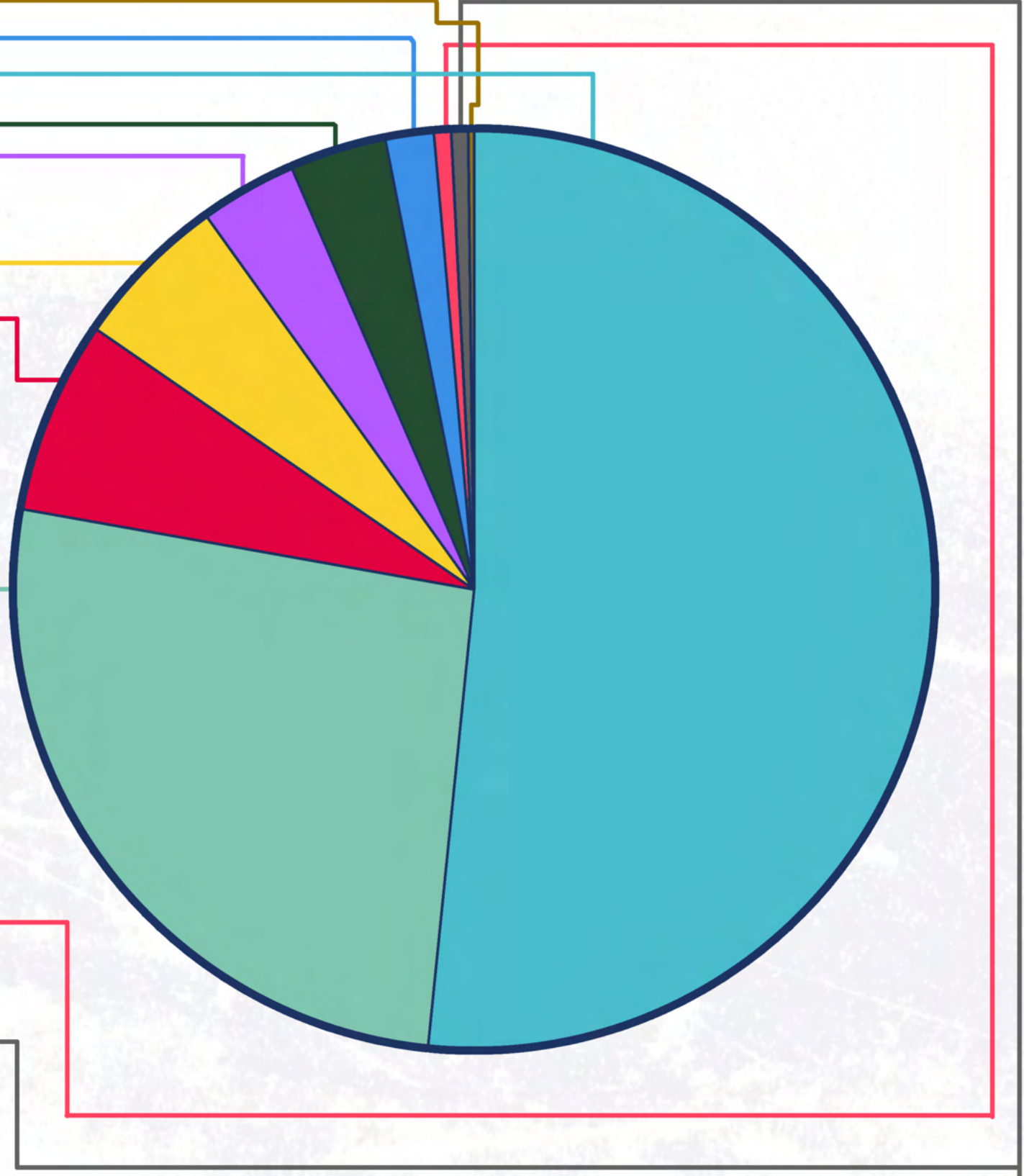
The YACs continued to support the sector with their offer of access audits, completing work for Tenterhooks and Take Me Somewhere. In August they delivered two presentations as part of Youth Theatre Arts Scotland's Summer Learning and Engagement Programme. The presentations were titled:

Making it Accessible: Part 1 - Behind the Scenes
Making it Accessible: Part 2 - In the Room

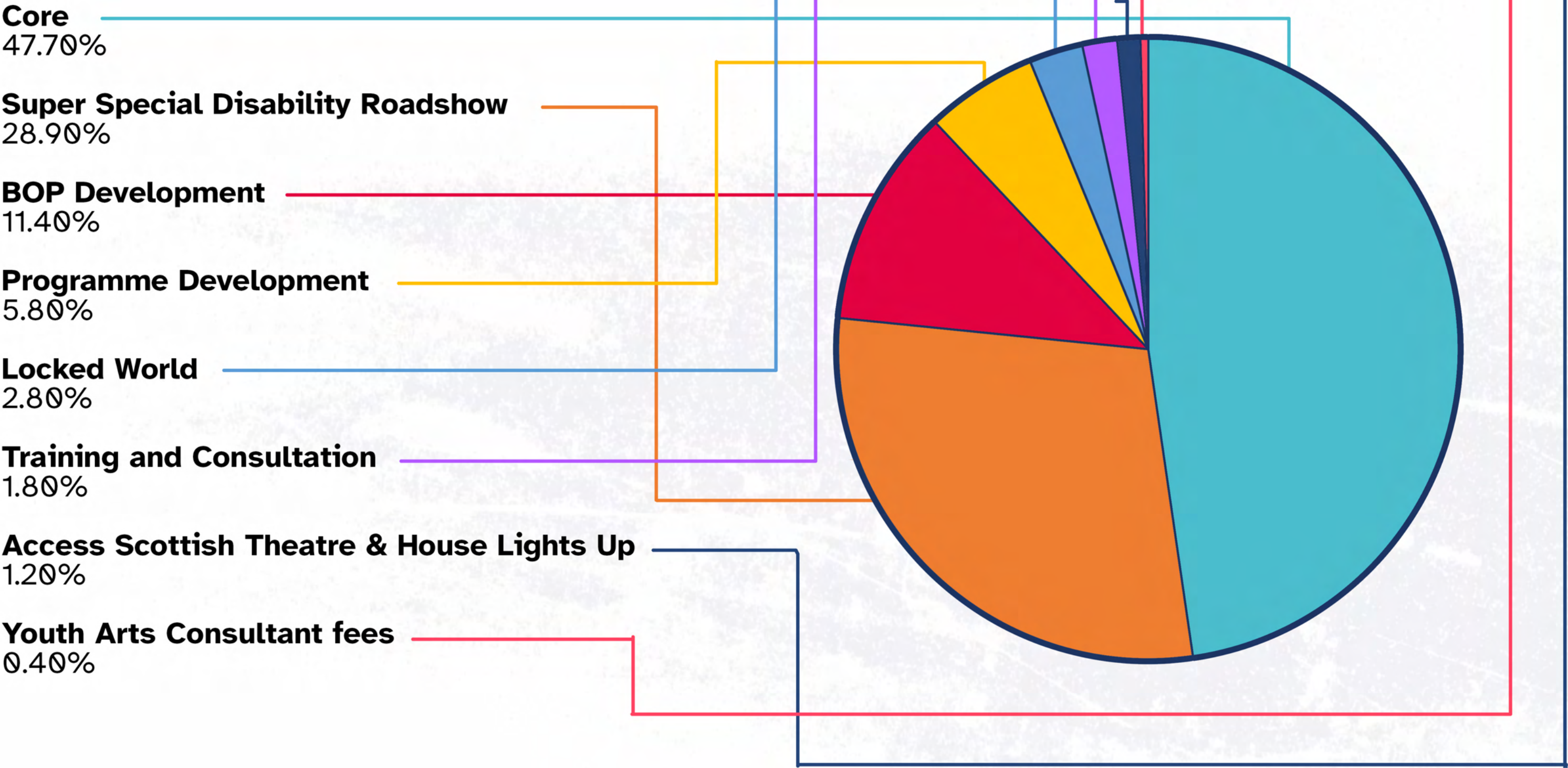
To find out more please click [here](#).

BOP IN NUMBERS:
Income

- Creative Scotland**
51.60%
- Earned Income**
26.20%
- Glasgow City Council**
6.80%
- Access to Work**
5.50%
- Genesis Foundation**
3.40%
- Access Scottish Theatre**
3.40%
- The Robertson Trust**
1.70%
- Government Support**
0.60%
- YAC Earned Income**
0.60%
- Donations**
0.20%



BOP IN NUMBERS:
Expenditure



Funded by:



With thanks to:



Cover Image - Super Special Disability Roadshow:
Stills of the filming. Photo by Niall Walker



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