

BARREL ORGAN: TOWN SQUARED Leighton-Linslade Town Council Proposal Document

Support requested: Barrel Organ are seeking a letter of support from Leighton-Linslade Town Council with a promise of funding of £2,000 on condition of a successful Arts Council England project grant. If the project goes ahead, we will also require support with planning permission for outdoor events and assistance with public engagement.

THE COMPANY

The show is never finished

We are Barrel Organ. We are a multi-award-winning touring company. Using a collaborative process, we make work that invokes meaningful change by challenging existing preconceptions of what theatre is and can be.

Key Facts

- Incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in 2016 (Company number 10164780).
- Proportion of income for 2019/20 financial year (last fully operational year pre-Covid): Arts Council England funding (43%), commissions (22%), theatre tax relief (22%) box office (10%) and trusts & foundations (3%).
- 75% success rate with Arts Council England project grants in the past three years.
- Previous work includes: *Nothing, Some People Talk About Violence, Anyone's Guess How We Got Here* and *CONSPIRACY*.
- Currently seeking status as a charitable incorporated organisation.
- Project led by Cedars alumnus Dan Hutton, Barrel Organ's Associate Director.

THE PROJECT

Town Squared will bring Barrel Organ's unique brand of theatre-making to Leighton-Linslade, collaborating with its communities to make live, exciting work which speaks to the present moment. The project will begin with a series of workshops with citizen writers, who will, with Barrel Organ directors, explore the process of creating a script for performance. Having discussed and considered the possibilities of live theatre, each writer will then be commissioned to pen their own short play, which will be presented by a professional cast and team during a one-day outdoor festival in Summer 2022. The project will be largely funded by Arts Council England and trusts & foundation grants.

BENEFITS

Should LLTC choose to support this endeavour at this stage, and the subsequent initial Arts Council England bid is successful, Barrel Organ can guarantee:

- A number of free theatre workshops for both Cedars and Vandyke Upper Schools
- A series of free, open storytelling workshops between November 2021 and March 2022
- Eight-week playwriting course (meeting weekly, with respected theatre directors and playwrights) and subsequent paid commission for five citizens
- Paid engagement with three local artistic consultants, to discuss and shape the project and think more broadly about theatre in Leighton-Linslade
- Inter-generational cross-pollination through creativity activity
- Evaluation report on the company's findings from this period

NB: The culminating festival will be dependent on further successful funding bids.

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44 Club Garden Road, Sheffield, S11 8BU

Co-Directors Ali Pidsley Ellie Cloughton, Rosie Gray Associate Director Dan Hutton

TOWN SQUARED AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

AIMS

- Activate the creative and theatrical life of Leighton-Linslade
- Expose the people of Leighton-Linslade across generations to different ways of approaching theatre and storytelling
- Support communities to tell the stories they want to tell
- Sow the seeds for future collaboration and an independent, professional theatre scene within the community
- Engage groups of people who would not otherwise have seen themselves as theatre-makers
- Using theatre to create a sense of pride and belonging in communities and individuals
- Demonstrate to people from a variety of backgrounds and age groups that theatre-making is a viable career, and offer ways of making work which don't require moving to a major city

OBJECTIVES

- Find unheard voices in the town by hosting storytelling workshops and meet-and-greet events
- Work with local 'Heroes' to locate participants and build buzz for the project
- Work with local schools and groups to inspire and engage local young people and community groups
- Work with communities to discover more daring ways of telling their stories, which aren't necessarily reliant on traditional forms
- Through two months of weekly workshops, share knowledge and understanding about contemporary playwriting with a small group of citizen-writers
- Commission the citizen-writers to write short plays on a subject of their choosing
- Support citizen-writers with rigorous, professional feedback and notes
- Work with a hybrid of citizen and professional artists and creatives to produce fully-realised productions of the short plays
- Present the plays at a pay-what-you-decide festival, alongside a locally curated programme of local musicians, comedians and artists
- Lay the groundwork for future collaborations between citizens and support newly-discovered creatives to make moves in the industry, if they so wish
- Lay the groundwork for similar events to continue in future years, with or without the involvement of Barrel Organ

THE WRITING PROCESS

Who are we looking for?

Barrel Organ seeks to find storytellers in Leighton-Linslade from all walks of life. These individuals are unlikely to be people who have already written plays for stage or have a large body of work behind them; instead, we want to discover new, unheard voices and lift them up using creative tools. We hope to assemble a group of five or six writers with something new to say, but who may not yet know how to say it. The group will be as diverse and representative as possible, representing a range of ages, backgrounds, opinions and experiences.

Although the writing course and the subsequent commissions will only be available to a small group, some storytelling and theatre-making workshops will be free and open-access, ensuring that a larger group of people are enabled to be creative and learn more about the playwriting process.

How will we find the writers?

The process for selecting writers will be iterative and qualitative; there will be no formal application process or interviews. Instead, we will use our connections with stakeholders, including Leighton-Linslade Town Council, Cedars and Vandyke schools, community groups and local businesses, to locate participants who might benefit from and be interested in such an opportunity. A fact-finding week in November will also allow company members to speak with a wide range of individuals and groups, spending time in various locations to hear what people have to say and discover who is telling stories about the town whose voice may not be heard.

The Workshops

From January to March 2022, the writers' group will meet weekly to learn about the craft of playwriting and theatre-making. The group will read and discuss extant plays, share ideas and questions about the writing process, hear from a number of professional writers about their craft, engage in creative exercises with the workshop leaders and, perhaps most importantly, speak with one another about their own work.

These workshops will be professionally-led, fun and rigorous, demonstrating that with the right tools and a passion for telling stories, anyone can be a writer. There will be multiple moments throughout the process when other community members will be invited to join, to ensure the benefits of the workshops are available to a wide group.

Once the initial eight-week period is over, the writers will have two months to pen a short play of around twenty minutes in length. Throughout this period, Barrel Organ team members will be available to answer any questions which might arise, workshop extracts of text in community workshops, and share notes on the scripts.

THE FESTIVAL

Once the short plays (see above) have been written, they will be handed over to casts and creative teams made up of a mixture of individuals from Leighton-Linslade and professional theatre-makers, to ensure both groups learn from one another. These plays will then be rehearsed (accounting for work and family commitments) to a professional standard, for presentation in summer 2022.

Where will the festival happen?

There are a number of possible locations for this event. The company believes in making theatre as accessible to as wide a range of audiences as possible, and so to that end we envisage the shows being presented in either community spaces or in the open air. Ultimately, these decisions will be led by the material the writers create, but they will be made aware of the following possibilities to guide them throughout the process:

- *Parks:* A temporary theatre space might be set up in a marquee or similar structure (in the mould of Paines Plough's Roundabout venue) in one of the town's parks (Mentmore Playing Fields, Pages Park, Parson's Close). This will ensure the venue is accessible and involves a festival spirit.
- *Town Centre:* Outdoor performances by the Market Cross, potentially on a Friday night, would help the project to involve a certain degree of place-making and provide a dramatic and historical backdrop for the plays.
- *Promenade:* Using one of the town's trails (Living History Trail, Children's Trail) as a guide, the plays might follow an open-air route, perhaps culminating at an indoor venue
- *Community spaces:* Indoor spaces will also be scouted to account for adverse weather

Wraparound programme

As well as the plays themselves, the day will be accompanied by a programme of local bands, comedians and other live artists, selected by a team of local curators. These acts might take the form of interval entertainment. They might lead the audience from one location to the next. They might round off the evening with a concert, to celebrate the creativity and artistry of Leighton-Linslade. Whichever form these performances take, they will help give the event a sense of celebration and wonder, showcasing all the different talents in the local community.

PROPOSED PROJECT TIMELINE

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|------------|---|
| Sept 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial conversations with LLTC about funding and other support • Writing marketing, engagement and audience development plans • First Arts Council England funding bid (six week decision period) • Initial conversations with trusts and foundations, including Paul Hamlyn Foundation |
| Oct 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First ACE project bid result |
| Nov 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact-finding week, meeting with local stakeholders including, but not limited to, LLTC, schools, cultural groups, civic leaders and businesses • Free storytelling workshops in schools and the community |
| Jan 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writers' workshops begin (weekly, for 8 weeks) • Second Arts Council England funding bid |
| Feb 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pull together team for culminating festival • Second ACE project bid result |
| March 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to curate and organise wraparound events |
| April 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writers pen plays and receive notes on drafts |
| May 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with publishers to publish scripts |
| June 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designs finalised for shows • Rehearsals begin, with hybrid teams of professional and local artists |
| July 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed festival day, TBD in consultation with LLTC • Wraparound events coinciding with Children's Trail and Tree Trail |
| Aug 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation & follow-up with all stakeholders and participants • Outcomes published publicly |

NB: To be finalised in discussion with LLTC and other stakeholders.

AUDIENCE AND PARTICIPANT DEVELOPMENT

As with most theatre, the audience for Town Squared is broadly split into three groups:

1. Existing friends, family and supporters
2. Local stakeholders, Neighbours or Residents
3. Special interest groups

1. Existing fans, friends, family and supporters

Reached through – personal interaction from participants or the Company, social media and email

Prevented from engaging by – cost, time, prioritising other events, transport

Convinced to engage by – targeted engagement, pay-what-you-decide tickets, other external factors (broader marketing), enthusiasm of individual promoting their own work, emotional attachment

Success relies largely on the enthusiasm of each individual, but there are ways to incentivise these groups to attend. This group is heavily influenced by external factors such as press features and broader marketing in making a decision to attend the show. Utilising the ‘voice’ of the individuals involved in the project through social media and face-to-face contact is key to encouraging this group to attend, as is emotional attachment to the individuals working on the project.

2. Local stakeholders, Neighbours or Residents

This group falls into two subcategories: those who have attended theatre events before and those who have not.

a) Previous theatre attendees

Reached through - Direct contact from the Company, advertising around the venue, Company & LLTC website, social media.

Prevented from engaging by - Previous bad experience at the theatre, unknown company and production.

Convinced to engage by - Intersection of marketing from the Company, positive press features and word-of-mouth.

b) Theatre newbies

Reached through - General marketing that is non-theatre specific, local advertising, social media targeting, workshops.

Prevented from engaging by - Unfamiliarity with theatre, preconceptions about the venue, unfamiliarity with Barrel Organ and its shows.

Convinced to engage by - Pay-what-you-decide tickets, strong press coverage, ongoing word-of-mouth throughout the project, workshops encouraging them to see the show themselves.

3. Special interest groups

Special interest groups vary between those that may engage as individuals or small groups, to those that may engage en masse. Three of these are covered below, but it is likely that we'll continue to identify new groups over the course of the project.

a) Writers

Reached through - Special interest marketing, interest in existing theatre and the Arts, social media targeting

Prevented from engaging by - Distance from or unfamiliarity with the project, potential lack of engagement with theatre or the Arts

Convinced to engage by - Value for money, overcoming of distrust, convenience of location, appropriateness to background

b) Schools

Reached through - Local newspapers and advertising in key places of interest, direct marketing, free workshops

Prevented from engaging by - Logistical implications, curriculum bias, availability of time, busy summer term

Convinced to engage by - Pay-what-you-decide tickets, free complimentary workshops, convenience of location, appropriateness to subjects being taught

c) Audience interested in local stories

Reached through - Local special interest publications, higher education societies or courses, cross-marketing, social media targeting

Prevented from engaging by - Cost implications, unfamiliarity with the project or company, difficulty in accessing location

Convinced to engage by - Pay-what-you-decide tickets, convenience of location, social media targeting and remarketing, general marketing creating a hype around the project

Throughout the project, Barrel Organ will work with marketing consultants to promote articles around the subject on social media and in local publications. As soon as potential audiences and participants are aware of the themes and ideas of the project, we are confident they will engage if possible, so we will ensure they are targeted carefully and efficiently using promoted ads and local and regional press coverage. The company will also work closely with Leighton Buzzard Library Theatre and local arts and theatre organisations to both reach their audiences and ensure new audiences are aware of them once the project has ended.

OUTCOME & LEGACY

Barrel Organ will ensure the ripples from this project live on in Leighton-Linslade long after the culminating festival in a number of ways:

- Consistent engagement with Leighton Buzzard Library Theatre and local arts and theatre organisations will ensure any new audience members or participants discovered as a result of Town Squared will be aware of the existing cultural offering in Leighton-Linslade
- Sustained follow-up evaluation events will continue after the final performances, ensuring both audiences and participants can reflect on the project and its outcomes
- Local artistic consultants and 'Heroes' will be equipped with administrative and artistic tools and skills to assist the continuance of independent theatre in Leighton-Linslade
- Barrel Organ team members will remain available for advice to any participant who may require it
- If any participant wants to pursue a professional theatre career as a result of the project, we will endeavour to champion their work and instigate introductions with our extensive networks
- Through our contacts with theatre publishers, the short plays will be professionally published and all participants involved will have their names in print for posterity

PROPOSED PROJECT BUDGET

Barrel Organ expects that the majority of this project will be funded by two Arts Council England project grants. One of these grants will cover the research and development period, and the second the production costs (the current project grant cap is £15,000; from September 2021, up to £30,000 can be requested). The company is confident that these applications for funding will be successful for three reasons:

- a) 75% of all project grants applied for by the company in the past three years have been successful.
- b) Alongside other criteria, Arts Council England requires only 10% match funding to secure funding, including in-kind support. Alongside pre-existing support, trusts and foundations, local business sponsorship and other stakeholder investment, we are confident this target will be hit.
- c) This project is in keeping with the organisation's ten-year strategy, Let's Create, which seeks to invest in work which empowers communities culturally and encourages everyone to express and develop their creativity.

HEADLINE FIGURES

Income

- Total income: £65,000
- Arts Council England project grants: $(£15,000 \times 1) + (£30,000 \times 1) = £45,000$
- Trusts and foundations (e.g. Paul Hamlyn Foundation Arts Access and Participation Fund): £15,000
- Leighton-Linslade Town Council: £2,000
- Local business sponsorship and support: £2,000
- Pay-what-you-decide ticket income: £1,000
- Throughout the period, the project will also be supported by Barrel Organ's Company Directors, whose fees come from a different funding pot

NB: Barrel Organ pays all freelance contractors a daily company wage of £125, or £600 per week, in line with industry standards (ITC, Equity) and the average national income.

Expenditure

- Total cost: £64,850, broken down into:
 - Research, development and writing period: £15,450
 - Production budget: £49,400
- Budget breakdown:
 - Barrel Organ staff & freelance practitioners: £21,500
 - Participant and community fees: £16,600
 - Marketing, publicity, audience development & legacy: £5,550
 - Equipment and hire: £5,000
 - Design and props: £4,200
 - Accommodation: £3,100
 - Insurance, legal and health & safety: £2,000
 - Travel & transport: £1,000
 - Contingency (10%): £5,900

BARREL ORGAN

Barrel Organ began as a group of eleven university students looking to make work outside of the existing structures and status quo. Our first show, **Nothing** (text by Lulu Raczka, made by the company), was a series of monologues that focused on experiences of isolation as a young person. The process enabled us to develop an ensemble based practice, co-created by multiple artists working towards a shared idea. The piece also sparked our interest in the audience acting as our 12th collaborator, and we continue to make work with them at the centre of the process. *Nothing* was performed in car parks, houses and in theatre spaces and adapted in multiple mediums including film and via phone calls.

Our second show, *Some People Talk About Violence* (text by Lulu Raczka, made by the company), explored every day violence and mental health in young women and was shortlisted for the **Amnesty International Freedom of Expression of Award** in 2015. Our third show, *Anyone's Guess How We Got Here* (text by Jack Perkins, made by the company), focused on the human cost of debt and premiered at Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2017. All three shows went on to tour nationally. In 2019, Barrel Organ won the **Untapped Underbelly & New Diorama Theatre** for *CONSPIRACY* (text by Jack Perkins, made by the company), a show about conspiracy theories and the concept of truth.

Sparked by the desire to provide artists with a similar platform to the one we received as a young company, we began running **LIVE** with **Camden People's Theatre** in 2015. LIVE is a scratch night for emerging artists to test new material and became a national project in 2016. Keen to continue our work platforming emerging artists, we curated the Emerge Festival at **Warwick Arts Centre** in 2016. As part of the festival we co-created a production with current Warwick students, *The Community Show* who went on to form theatre company, Emergency Chorus. Since then we have co-created work with **Cambridge Junction Young Company** and **Sheffield People's Theatre**.

All our previous work has established a commitment to theatrical experimentation whilst also ensuring our work is made collaboratively with a diverse range of participants and audiences. We have created a blueprint of audience led work that challenges existing preconceptions of what theatre is and can be and places co-creation at the core of everything we do. We are currently working with **English Touring Theatre** to workshop an adaptation of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* with fifteen young people from across the UK. We are also co-creating a new verbatim piece, *Common Ground*, about loneliness between generations with York based collective, Think-It.

TESTIMONIALS

Alan Lane - Artistic Director, Slung Low

I have known Barrel Organ for years since they began at the National Student Drama Festival. I have been very impressed with the work Barrel Organ have been doing – platforming young companies and artists through co-creating work with them. I think they have what it takes to be a company who have longevity and a sustainable model which will not only breed excellent work, but be genuinely socially engaged and support individuals and communities. Their thinking feels genuinely new, relevant and exciting and I fully support them going forwards.

Testimonials from 2021 'Tess Young Company' participants

The environment created by the Barrel Organ members was the perfect balance between chilled out and ambitious. Tess Company was the best way to stretch some acting muscles and to try out some new ones. I felt valued, part of a team and that my opinion was valid and heard, which is all an aspiring young performer can ask for.

Barrel Organ were the perfect people to run the project, their understanding and passion for wanting to include young people in the theatre industry really showed throughout the 8 weeks and after. They really wanted us to just bring our true selves to the workshops and to share our honest opinions. They have continued to help us TYC members by offering us incredibly informative and enjoyable masterclasses with professional theatre makers and actors.

During a time in which my own and young people's mental health is extremely fragile, having a goal and purpose and a safe place to meet up to chat about creating theatre is essential.

Reference:

Name: Brian Logan

Title: Artistic Director

Venue: Camden People's Theatre

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