

SBTD BLOG: AAPTLE



by Katie Scott

A few weeks ago I was sat contemplating the future of our work having had a few wider conversations, led by venues, for freelancers. Though they were so helpful and obviously well considered; it had struck me that no one from my particular job role (designer) would exist in these conversations, as we're rarely attached to a building. Our job is often very hands on and very chatty. We spend a lot of time liaising and communicating with departments, balancing what the director wants, what you the designer wants and what everyone else says we can have/afford. It's a finely tuned balancing act and each show has a different tight rope.

So the thought of being more remote, potentially doing presentations and fittings on zoom began to feel more and more stressful. Even if we WERE to go to the theatres to work, what if we have two projects? This is particularly concerning when living out of London... I am local to one theatre who have an in house team... most of my work is regional and it can be 100's of miles (lots of local lockdowns) away.

Naturally, I turned to Twitter... (what else do you do in a crisis?)

“SBTD were quick to respond to my concerns and invited me to join a conversation.”

I think it's worth noting at this point that I felt like I'd made a huge mistake. I wanted to be involved in the conversations but I, a self confessed dont-ask-me-I-just-complain person... suddenly felt like I would have to back up my frustrations with logical and rational thinking AND share them..

...Gosh.

The thing is, I absolutely do logically and rationally consider my career all the time! I just don't do anything with that thought (other than mutter like Mutley into my tea during fittings). The one truly brilliant thing about all of this, is that I now CAN do something with that thought.

The work of the associations is brilliant and powerful but EVERY SINGLE PERSON is a practitioner. Everyone does what we do! In totally different ways, at totally different career milestones. As Fiona Watt once brilliantly said to me.. “we often feel we don't have the time, but we have to MAKE the time” and isn't that true? We spend more time trying to meet deadlines on small wages with even bigger and better designs than ever before.. yet we won't spare time to challenge the stress? The low pay? Long hours? Obligations? Lack of credits? Lack of tea breaks? Lack of a desk?!?!? Let me tell you fellow early to mid-career designers. If we DON'T make the time, if we don't offer our thoughts and experiences.. nothing will change. You will still cry in the toilets and get ill after every tech week if you don't consider this as much your responsibility, as it is to provide a design. You might not have much to say, but your experiences help to paint a much larger picture, that fits on a much bigger placard, with which we challenge the norm...

And so I went along to the Zoom... with every intention of not speaking to anyone and sitting very quietly whilst the REAL professionals spoke.

“Introducing... AAPTLE! Yes we love an acronym in this industry! But this is the Acronym of acronyms! The Alliance of Associations and Professionals for Theatre and Live Events. Kinda like the Avengers...”

Here's a list of the assembled: SBTD (Society Of British Theatre Designers), Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT), ALD (Association of Lighting Designers), PMF (Production Managers Forum), SMA (Stage

Managers Association), CITA (Costume In Theatre Association), SCENE CHANGE, FMTW (Freelancers Make Theatre Work), STAGE SIGHT, ASD (Association of Sound Designers), Personal Managers Association, SDUK (Stage Directors UK), FTF (Freelancers Task Force) and more joining as we gain momentum.

The Manifesto:

The Alliance of Associations and Professionals for Theatre and Live Events (known as AAPTLE) will actively share their knowledge about their individual organisations, openly discuss current issues that affect our industry and will all share and collaborate together for a better, more sustainable and fairer future of the Theatre and Live Events industry.

We represent the whole infrastructure of theatre workers in the UK, that includes resident staff and the freelance workforce who come together to create all live performance.

Beliefs –

The Alliance believes in the importance of Theatre and Live Events and will endeavour to promote our industry in all sectors of society for its betterment and the improvement of the industry as a whole.

Aims –

–To establish an Alliance that will be an open and ever evolving community, supporting ways to come together, connect and take action.

–To actively work towards making our industry a safe, inclusive and sustainable place to work, now and in the future.

–To actively inform and share each other’s actions and campaigns and work with the unions in order to have a unified voice in our industry.

–To openly and confidentially discuss contractual conditions as appropriate in order to prevent the erosion of existing terms and working standards and to promote best practice.

–To actively identify immediate issues within the industry and agree action points to mutually work towards improvements and find solutions.

–To remain in discussion and consolidate as one voice to become more influential in decisions of the industry for our future.

–To use the collaboration of this strong Alliance to benefit all our members and strengthen our associations.

Structure of the Alliance & Communication –

–Proceedings will be carried out in a spirit of collegial inclusiveness that is egalitarian and supportive with equitable debate where everyone’s views and contributions are welcomed and encouraged.

–To honour The Chatham House Rule for all information shared within the Alliance

–To Establish a list of each Association and Groups’ representatives in order to have confidence to speak freely.

–Each Association and Group will alternate the hosting, chairing and minuting of the regular meetings to encourage a democratic voice.

–Slack will be used as the tool to continue conversation and share all information.

“this will be slow change and it relies on honesty, collaboration and openness to see that we come back to theatres better than ever before”
So what’s been happening so far?

We’ve had invited guests from Hencilla Canworth, Equity and Bectu, the ABTT and extend new invitations to guest speakers each week to talk to us about the solutions and planning that is being put into place so far both with regards to Covid-19 and the wider infrastructure that we’re all a part of. Crucially this has given-space for us to debate these thoughts and challenge how the system is currently working. We aim to promote best practice and ensure we are doing all we can to safeguard our workforces.

As a freelancer based outside of London, I’ve tried to ensure the conversation is also considerate of companies and regional theatre. It’s so important that we remember theatre isn’t just the physical buildings . We need to encourage and nurture companies, regional venues and smaller venues who may not be members of UK theatre to work with us in ensuring safe and sustainable working practices and contracts for their teams. We recognise that we are a huge collective voice made up of associations and practitioners within our meetings (continuously adding more) and the aim is to use that voice to state clearly what we as a sector, need... Guess I did have something to say after all.

This is all such assuring work. It’s a united voice and I hope it encourages workers from all disciplines to join or converse with their associations in this huge time of change. I know particularly as a freelancer, it can feel as though speaking up is speaking against and you will be punished as such. The fear of losing work over challenging basic working rights is very real. This is how AAPTLE can support you. You’re not alone! The team of Avengers are listening. It’s time to ask more of our unions, theatre bodies, venues, managers, CEO’s, AD’s, producers and simply remind them that we are the workforce. This isn’t a hobby, it is a profession.

Like all huge changes happening across the globe in the aftermath of this pandemic, this will be slow change and it relies on honesty, collaboration and openness to see that we come back to theatres better than ever before.

“We fight for rights! AAPTLE ASSEMBLE.”

SBTD is represented at Alliance meetings by Katie Scott (SBTD Member), Fiona Watt (SBTD Chair), Cat Silver (SBTD Administrator), David Farley (Committee Member), Nicky Shaw (Director) and Sean Crowley (Director).

If you would like us to air any questions or issues of concern please get in touch admin@theatredesign.org.uk

You can find minutes of all the meetings to date [here](#)