

Brassneck Theatre Company
(A company limited by guarantee, not having a share capital)
DIRECTORS' ANNUAL REPORT
for the financial year ended 31 December 2024

The directors present their Directors' Annual Report, combining the Directors' Report and Trustees' Report, and the unaudited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.

The financial statements are prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2006, FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

The Directors' Report contains the information required to be provided in the Directors' Annual Report under the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) guidelines. The directors of the company are also charity trustees for the purpose of charity law and under the company's constitution are known as members of the board of trustees.

In this report the directors of Brassneck Theatre Company present a summary of its purpose, governance, activities, achievements, and finances for the financial year 31 December 2024.

The company is a registered charity and hence the report and results are presented in a form which complies with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 and, although not obliged to comply with the Statement of Recommended Practice applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland FRS 102, the organisation has implemented its recommendations where relevant in these financial statements.

Mission, Objectives, and Strategy

Mission Statement

By producing quality, professional theatre, Brassneck Theatre Company contributes to the re-imaging of West Belfast by endeavouring to break the pre-conceptions that exist about this part of our city. The company plays an integral part in everyday West Belfast society by enriching people's lives in the communities that we serve. Our work reflects all our citizens and is accessible to all. Brassneck Theatre Company is also dedicated to supporting the development of local artists, writers, directors, designers, technicians etc.

Brassneck Theatre Company also operates a youth company, 'Brassneck Youth.' Its primary focus is nurturing children and young people by providing them with professional arts training, masterclasses, and workshops to encourage access and participation in the arts while equipping them with the required tools to become the industry professionals of tomorrow. Another key priority of the company is ensuring the accessibility of theatre throughout the human lifecycle: from promoting access to theatre from the very start through education, as well as creating opportunities for children and young people for those considering a career in the arts.

The vision of Brassneck Theatre Company is to provide quality, professional theatre to local communities and further afield by focusing on the development of new writing which addresses themes of identity, history, culture, and religious and racial tolerance. Our productions will continue to be premiered in West Belfast, before touring extensively across Ireland and further afield therefore creating and sustaining a vibrant, healthy society.

Objectives

Brassneck Theatre Company has created a six-strand approach to achieving its core values, one that encapsulates both our mission and vision.

- To create professional, quality, and accessible theatre and delivering it to the highest possible standards
- To develop and nurture our youth members as well as local artists, writers, designers & technicians
- To be proactive in contributing to the re-imaging of West Belfast
- To promote our plays, through themes of identity, history, culture, and tolerance
- To represent local communities by providing them with a collective and inclusive voice
- To collaborate with new and existing funding partners and private sponsors to improve company sustainability
- To develop audiences at a local, national, and international level as well as developing new audiences

Activities and Achievements in 2024

This year, Brassneck were successful in becoming an Annual Funding Programme (AFP) client for the first time, with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. We received international recognition with our production of Project Children, and toured Gina Donnelly's play 'Anthem For Dissatisfaction' to the Dublin Fringe Festival, winning the Solas Nua Award 2024. We reprised our powerful 2023 initiative The Peoples Panto in 2024 and was our largest audience ever for a Brassneck show. We are delighted with the ongoing success of Brassneck Youth, but are struggling to meet the demand. We will hopefully get additional funding to open up the programme to those young people currently on the waiting list.

Brassneck Theatre Company
(A company limited by guarantee, not having a share capital)
DIRECTORS' ANNUAL REPORT
for the financial year ended 31 December 2024

ARTISTIC PROGRAMMING

Project Children

'Project Children' was reprised at The Lyric Belfast in April 2024. Project Children founder, Denis Mulcahy, flew in from the US to attend the performance.

Project Children was inspired by the initiative of the same name, set up in 1975. Brothers Patrick and Denis Mulcahy, Cork natives and members of the NYPD, watched news footage of the violence from back home. From this, 'Project Children' is born. Over the next 40 years, they would bring over 23,000 Catholic and Protestant kids to the U.S during the Summer months, as respite from the conflict. Belfast Playwright, Fionnuala Kennedy, documented this extraordinary intervention through interviews with those who participated in Project Children.

The Stage: ****

<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/project-children-review-at-the-lyric-theatre-belfast-brassneck-theatre-by-fionnuala-kennedy>

"This charming, pitch-perfect piece should travel widely; its content, context and disarmingly comedic treatment will have audiences laughing out loud, before cutting them to the quick."

Belfast Media Group

<https://belfastmedia.com/theatre-review-project-children-is-funny-poignant-and-still-relevant-18ee57e1-51cc-41fe-9c23-75dd3c59f20f>

"Project Children is an enduring story of hope amidst the chaos and one which Fionnuala Kennedy and Brassneck must be commended in telling."

Anthem For Dissatisfaction

Anthem For Dissatisfaction tells the story of "Irish Twins" Sarah and Jamie, who are about to hit 30. But before they do, they're reliving their greatest hits; 'Credit crunch', 'Austerity' and 'Free School Meals'... *Benefits Britain* never sounded so good!

'Anthem for Dissatisfaction' by Gina Donnelly had its World Premiere at Féile in August 2024 at The Roddy McCorley Heritage Centre, and one show at University of Ulster. The show received rave reviews from critics and audience members. The play then travelled to Dublin as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival where it won the Solas Nua Award.

The Reviews Hub: ****

<https://www.thereviewshub.com/anthem-for-dissatisfaction-smock-alley-theatre-dublin-fringe-festival-2024/>

"Euphoric, real, brutal"

Belfast Media Group

<https://belfastmedia.com/theatre-review-feile-gets-off-to-a-flier-with-anthem-play-at-the-roddies>

"...a rip-roaring tour de force that will leave you dissatisfied to the very end – because you want more."

The People's Panto

In December 2024, Brassneck produced its second ever People's Panto. This year, the panto was Sleeping Beauty, written by and starring Neil Keery.

The People's Panto was set up to create a high-quality, professional pantomime that will increase access to the arts for families from disadvantaged communities and schools with high numbers of students in receipt of Free School Meals, with an affordable ticket price in two local, accessible venues – St Comgall's, Falls Road, and Forth River Bowling Club, Woodvale Park.

This year, we received sponsorship from CCU Credit Union. CCU said, *"This partnership was a true alignment of both organisations core values. CCU Credit Union & Brassneck Theatre Company share a common vision to improve the lives of local, working-class families. At CCU, we want to demonstrate a commitment to more than just financial backing, we want to invest in a community-wide uplift and enrich the lives of its members. This initiative from Brassneck was something we were delighted to get behind. It has enormous potential to enhance the cultural landscape of West Belfast."*

Brassneck Theatre Company
(A company limited by guarantee, not having a share capital)
DIRECTORS' ANNUAL REPORT
for the financial year ended 31 December 2024

This year, we achieved:

- 30 performances
- 5429 audience members
- 1871 school pupils
- Marginalised groups who received discretionary free tickets. Groups included: Whiterock Children's centre, De Paul Ireland (families in hostel in Belfast), the Anaka women's group (refugee families and people seeking asylum), and local groups to the venue – Falls Residents Association, Divis Youth Project, Forth Spring Community Centre.
- Groups with discounted tickets (£5) included Newington Day Centre, Holy Family youth centre, Ligoneil Improvement Association, North Queen Street Community Group, and the Lower Ormeau Residents Association Group.

Alan in Belfast Blog

<http://alaninbelfast.blogspot.com/2024/12/sleeping-beauty-quality-pantomime-that.html>

"A quality pantomime that packs a punch without burning a hole in your pocket"
Belfast Media Group

<https://belfastmedia.com/sleeping-beauty>

"Expect a great romp with plenty of sleggin' and banter and with the venue only metres from the city centre, this panto is accessible to families from right across the city."

Rebel Without A Claus

This year, we were delighted to work with infamous Belfast comedian Paddy McDonnell, and supported him in writing and performing his one-man show 'Rebel Without a Claus', in the Roddy McCorley Heritage Centre. This was a Christmas offering for adult audiences, and the show sold-out towards the end of the run.

BRASSNECK YOUTH

The youth programme has over 72 members enrolled this year. The waiting list is still high because retention is high, but we are aiming to extend these programmes in 2025/26.

This year, Brassneck Youth worked with Belfast Film Festival on their 'Hearth' programme which is part of Belfast Stories 2024 project.

The English National Theatre of London worked with the older actors on a development with local playwright Amanda Verlaque on her new play. Later this year, Brassneck Youth were accepted onto the NT Connections programme, and will be working with the older actors on this resulting in performances in a local venue in March 2025, and in The Lyric Theatre on 5th April 2025.

Two of our young actors made their debuts on the main stage at The Lyric Belfast with 'Project Children'. One of our young actors has been cast in a major television series for Channel 4 due to air in 2025. The older group participated in Feile's Haunted House in October 2024. Five of our young members were picked to be in The Hearth documentary, which premiered at Cineworld Odyssey on 12th December 2024.

Structure, Governance and Management

Structure

Brassneck Theatre Company has a management committee of up to 6 members who meet quarterly and are responsible for the strategic direction and policies of the charity. At present the charity has 6 members from a variety of professional backgrounds relevant to the work of the charity.

A scheme of delegation is in place and day to day responsibility of the services rest with the Company Manager and Artistic Director. They are responsible for ensuring the charity delivers the services specified and that key performance indicators are met. Sub-committees are in place to review some areas in greater detail e.g. finance and HR, programming, marketing.

Brassneck Theatre Company
(A company limited by guarantee, not having a share capital)
DIRECTORS' ANNUAL REPORT
for the financial year ended 31 December 2024

Governance

The Company was incorporated on 6th May 2009 as Brassneck Theatre Company. The company is constituted under a Memorandum and is governed under its Articles of Association.

There have been amendments to the governing documents in the year.

The Company has been registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland from 30th June 2016 under registration number NIC105096.

Public Benefit

Brassneck Theatre Company meet the public benefit requirement in the following ways; as stated in our Mission Statement we were established in order to satisfy the huge appetite for quality professional theatre in this part of the city.

Brassneck Theatre Company and Brassneck Youth lead in the heart of one of the most socio-economically deprived wards in the UK. We actively encourage new audiences to the arts while maintaining a large, loyal following who feel empowered through our work by seeing themselves, their stories and their own voices being reflected on the stage, giving audiences a sense of ownership and belonging.

We have recently developed and implemented a new-and-improved digital engagement strategy to better connect and engage with our audiences. As well as utilising our existing platforms on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, we have a mailing list with 298 subscribers (a 142% increase in the last 12 months) with a 35% engagement rate, well above the standard benchmark. We are also using new types of content to engage our audience such as video/reels, promotions, competitions and interactive content such as polls, Q&As and Instagram takeovers. We have increased our social media engagement by 206% in 2024 through the implementation of our digital engagement strategy.

This year, we have maintained our ethos of premiering new work in local venues in West Belfast as a part of Féile an Phobail before embarking on national tours and flagship venues with 'Project Children' at The Lyric. We took our newly commissioned play 'Anthem for Dissatisfaction' by Gina Donnelly to the Dublin Fringe festival. Our Youth Outreach Programme primarily targets children and young people from areas of high socio-economic deprivation across the city and continues to expand its outreach to even more areas and communities, year on year, with a current subscription of over 72 young people.

Through our vast touring remit, we will increase audience numbers nationally as well as internationally, with an uplift in the number of new venues that we will partner with. In 2023 we toured to 18 local and regional venues and in 2024 we returned to international touring to Smock Alley Dublin as a part of Dublin Fringe. In 2025 we will continue to expand this remit with new international venues in Edinburgh and the US.

In the last two years, our General Manager has developed our process for tracking our audiences and collecting feedback from them, which we now consider to be a strength of the organisation. For our latest 'People's Panto' project, 'Sleeping Beauty', in 2024, we engaged the services of THRIVE and their IMPACT survey, using our ticket platform Ticket Tailor, to help measure the impact of not just the show itself but the wider impact of attending arts and culture for audiences in Northern Ireland. This not only helps us as an organisation to see what we are doing well and how to improve, but also the wider impact of the arts, thus helping the arts sector here demonstrate its impact for increased funding from the Executive, helping everyone in the sector.

In addition to continuing to increase audience numbers year on year, we have identified that we would like to diversify the range of people that will have the opportunity to participate in our high-quality productions for example, younger people and disabled audiences. We have had some success with this in our 24/25 programme, attracting a younger demographic with 'Anthem for Dissatisfaction' (39% 18-39 year-olds) and having signed performances and special performances of our Panto specifically for elderly people with dementia and adults with learning difficulties. We aim to build on this by offering a relaxed performance for the 'People's Panto' project in 2025, as well as offering more signed performances.

By the end of 2024, we have had 9567 audience members engaging with our work, had 68 performances of new writing by Belfast writers and performers, employed over 50 local artists and facilitators, had over 72 young people in our youth drama programme, and have given over 500 free tickets to marginalised groups. We anticipate this to be higher in 2025/26.

Indirect beneficiaries of our work include young people placed on work experience, a sharing of resources with other relevant arts companies, contribution to local government strategy and policy, interviews with PHD students to inform future research, contribution at conferences.

There are no benefits within Brassneck's work that would lead to any harm. There are also no private beneficiaries.

Brassneck Theatre Company
(A company limited by guarantee, not having a share capital)
DIRECTORS' ANNUAL REPORT
for the financial year ended 31 December 2024

Financial Review

The Trustees are very appreciative of the financial support that is provided by Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Garfield Weston, Arts and Business NI, Foyle Foundation, D'oyly Carte, Backstage Trust, Wavendon Foundation, Andrew Loyd-Webber Foundation, Children In Need, Halifax Foundation NI, CCU Credit Union, Ireland Funds and Belfast City Council.

Financial Results

At the end of the financial year the company has assets of £128,570 (2023: £129,593) and liabilities of £1,300 (2023: £1,300). The net assets of the company have decreased by £1,023 (2023: Increased £14,525).

Going Concern

Having reviewed the resources available the directors believe that the company has sufficient resources available to enable it to continue to meet its ongoing obligations as and when they fall due for a period of at least 12 months from the date of approval of the financial statements. In forming their assessment, the directors considered the company's current financial position, its income streams, and its funding requirements to May 2026.

Accordingly, the directors consider it appropriate to continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparation of the financial statements.

Directors

The directors who served throughout the financial year, except as noted, were as follows:

Maria McCourt
Connla McCann
Niall Murphy
Kevin Gamble
Rebecca Dalzell (Appointed on 1/5/2024)
Lynette Fay (Appointed on 16/09/2024)

The secretary who served during the financial year was:

Connla McCann

Compliance with Sector-Wide Legislation and Standards

The company engages pro-actively with legislation, standards and codes which are developed for the sector. Brassneck Theatre Company subscribes to and is compliant with the following:

- The Companies Act 2006
- The Charities SORP (FRS 102)

Approved by the Board of Directors on 16th May 2025 and signed on its behalf by:



Maria McCourt
Director

Date: 16 May 2025