

20 stories high



Annual Report 2008 – 2009



Metal



The Company

20 Stories High is a theatre company, led by Co-Artistic Directors Keith Saha and Julia Samuels. We are dedicated to making bold, contemporary and imaginative theatre for young audiences – which is rooted in the contexts of social inclusion and cultural diversity.

We are passionate about pushing the boundaries of what theatre is, and what it means to young people. Offering a wide and varied theatre experience, we continue to challenge ourselves, our audiences and our participants. Working with the narrative and musical influences of diverse communities mainly across Liverpool, we make vibrant, relevant theatre that young people want to see.

We create professional productions and participatory projects for young people aged thirteen to thirty.



20 Stories High:

- **create exceptional professional theatre**
- **root our work in cultural diversity and social inclusion**
- **collaborate with our participants/audiences in our creative processes**
- **instigate creative encounters between communities**
- **support and develop emerging artists**
- **involve participation at the heart of all we do**

We do this through:

- **PLAYLIST: exceptional new writing for young audiences**
- **MIX-UP: devising ground-breaking forms of theatre for young audiences**

20 Stories High was established at the beginning of 2006. In a very short space of time, the company has developed a reputation with our audiences, participants, peers and funders for creating inspiring, high quality, accessible work. 20 Stories High is Theatre Company in Residence at Jude Kelly's artists' hub METAL in Liverpool.

Statement from the Co-Artistic Directors

Since establishing 20 Stories High three years ago, we have been on an incredible journey. This year – 2008/9 has really allowed the company to grow to a new level in its development – and it is fitting to end the year with the publication of our first annual report.

In Spring 2008, we were feeling very excited. We had had a really successful first two years, which had culminated in us receiving one of the prestigious Liverpool Commissions, which meant that our show **Babul and the Blue Bear** would be part of main artistic programme for Liverpool's 2008 European Capital of Culture programme. We had also recently started our youth theatre, which had been taken on by the Arts Council as one of it's Young People's Participatory Theatre Project (YPPT) 'Pilot Projects' – and as such was being held up nationally as a model of good practice in terms of youth theatre.

Babul and the Blue Bear and the YPPT project **Dark Star Rising**, were twin projects – artistically interlinked. They represent 20 Stories High's commitment to have a deeply connected relationship between our professional touring work, and our participatory projects – creatively, politically and in terms of their narratives.

On the strength of its position in the Capital of Culture programme, we were able to tour **Babul and the Blue Bear** nationally – the first time we had worked outside of the North West. This was a very exciting experience, and allowed us to meet a very wide range of new partners, venues, audiences and participants. We could see that national touring presented a real opportunity for the company to make new connections and showcase our work more broadly – and is something that we now plan to incorporate into our ongoing artistic programmes.

The YPPT project really cemented the embryonic youth theatre, and has enabled it to become a central part of the whole organisation. Young people, partners and audiences alike were astounded by the quality of **Dark Star Rising**, as they were by the following project – our first site-specific production - **A Private Viewing**.

In 2008/9, 20 Stories High's profile increased exponentially. **Babul and the Blue Bear** - as a Liverpool Commission, a co-production with Contact and Horse & Bamboo, and as a national tour - really put our name on the map as an exciting touring company. The YPPT project also introduced our brand-new youth theatre onto the national and international theatre sector with a real bang. The creation of our ground-breaking website, also connected many new people to the company.

2008 was a very significant year for Liverpool as a city, and 20 Stories High are proud to be considered one of the successes of the European Capital of Culture.

We are looking forward to the next year in our development with 20 Stories High's artistic and social ethos being firmly placed on the landscape of British theatre. We are now recognised as offering something different in terms of art-form and content - and in terms of the way in which we interact and collaborate with our audiences and partner organisations.

Julia Samuels and Keith Saha

BABUL AND THE BLUE BEAR

IN ASSOCIATION WITH CONTACT AND HORSE AND BAMBOO
bringing together the worlds of hip-hop, theatre, masks and puppetry...



Once upon Grime in a land not so far away lived a young man called Benny. He lived in limbo in outer space with his only friend Blue Bear for company. However, one day something unexpected happens... Benny looks down, upon the earth and sees himself on a life support machine.

*“Switch off the machine mum
IM NOT COMING BACK!
I like it here man its chilled...
I’m gonna sit back, relax and dreamy...
Cos I’m sitting on my sugar spun cloud...
And I’m feeling peaches and creamy...
I’ve got the angels with me and there singing like hark the herald.
And they’re feeding me the sweet – beat notes Miss Ella Jane Fitzgerald”*

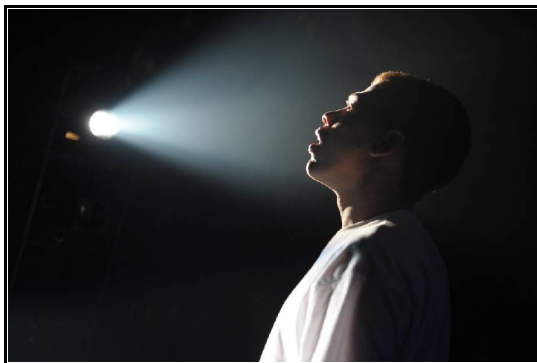
From this point on Benny throws the audience crashing back down to earth. He shows them what his life was like: from his yard and his Mam to the social services and his Street Fam.

“Oh my goodness, the show was absolutely amazing! I loved it. I think I felt every emotion possible, from being overcome with sadness and heartbreak for Benny and his family to just laughing my head off!”

Leanne Jones, Arts Development Officer, Knowsley MBC

“I’ve just been to see Babul and the Blue Bear at the Horse and Bamboo Theatre and it was really fantastic! It has left me feeling more aware of everything. On the drive home I started thinking through all sorts of events in my life, really opened up my mind and made things seem clearer. Truly amazing, thank you!”

Claire, Audience Member



Tour dates:

Contact Theatre – Manchester 24 – 27 September
Valley Community Theatre – Liverpool 30 Sept– 1 October
The Boo – Rossendale 3 October
Southport Arts Centre – Southport 7 October
Cornerstone Theatre – Liverpool 9 October
SPACE Bootle – Liverpool 10 – 11 October
Rose Theatre – Ormskirk 13 October
Unity Theatre – Liverpool 15 – 16 October

Barbican Theatre – Plymouth 18 October
Salisbury Arts Centre – Salisbury 21 October
Redbridge Drama Centre – London 23 October
Queen’s Hall Arts Centre – Hexham 25 October
The Drum – Birmingham 29 – 30 October
Trestle Arts Base – St Albans 1 November
The Met – Bury 5 November
Square Chapel Centre for the Arts – Halifax 7 November



The team:

Actors	Jonny Leigh-Wright (Benny) Everal A. Walsh (Kevin, Mum, Dad, Dwayne, Masha, Grimebone)	Associate artists	Bob Frith, Alison Duddle, Andrew Kim, Julia Samuels
Director	Keith Saha	Producers	Julia Samuels and Keith Saha
Writers	Keith Saha with Jonny Leigh-Wright and Everal A. Walsh	Production manager	Louise Tischler
Design	Rachana Jadhav with Neequaye Dsane	Stage manager	Tamsin Rose
Mask design	Neequaye Dsane	Assistant state manager	Dan Lees
Lighting design	Ciaran Bagnal	Set build	Lobster Productions
Puppet design	Jo Pocock and Neequaye Dsane	Production photography	Robert Day
Music composition / sourcing	Keith Saha	Administration	Tessa Buddle and Nicola Green
Sound design	Dan Steele		



Specially commissioned by the Liverpool Culture Company Ltd as part of the 2008 European Capital of Culture programme.



DARK STAR RISING

In partnership with Urbeatz

A Pilot Project as part of Arts Council England's *Young People's Participatory Theatre (YPPT)* Initiative.

Having set up the 20 Stories High youth theatre in January 2008, *Dark Star Rising* was the group's first performance project, which we ran in partnership with local music organisation Urbeatz.

Incorporating elements of music, dance, rap and poetry, *Dark Star Rising* is a play set in a Liverpool community that follows the events that occur after a local boy is stabbed. Focusing in particular on the younger members of the community, the play provides a vibrant, funny and sincere insight into the everyday lives of young people in Liverpool.

Participants also took part in a range of additional activities including The Lord Mayor's Parade, Contacting The World, The Big Event and Get In International Theatre Conference.

Dark Star Rising was performed over 2 nights in July at the Cornerstone Theatre in Liverpool.



"The best performance I have seen in a long time"

Audience member

"The whole thing was boss. Even my dad liked the show! Thank you for getting me involved"

Participant

Key achievements:

- Unprecedented demand: group of 27 retained throughout project
- 56% of participants from BME backgrounds
- Project brought together young people from across Liverpool
- Young people able to discuss issues that are important to them
- Participants experimented with a range of artforms
- 23 participants supported to take up a range of additional opportunities
- Profile of project raised on a local, national and international scale

"The growth and maturity of these young people have been great... you guys have stirred something in them. Their confidence and skills have improved and I believe many of them will take things further in the future"

Yaw Owusu, Chief Executive Officer, Urbeatz

The team:

Project Directors	Julia Samuels and Keith Saha
Musical Directors	Keith Saha and Kofi Owusu
Youth Theatre Coordinator	Anisa Saleh
Designer	Christopher Murray
Stage Manager	Maria Baker
Lighting Designer	Hannah Whitfield
Evaluation Coordinator	Tessa Buddle



A Private Viewing

A site-specific performance in the flat above 20 Stories High's office in Kensington, Liverpool. Supported by Kensington Regeneration.



"The actors and actresses were good at acting and it felt like you were really at a house viewing!"

"It was very different from anything I've seen before... I felt a lot of different emotions"

"again 20 Stories youth theatre totally impress me"

"Great idea – made me think about changes in culture through the years and sense of history around us"

Audience feedback

The Team:

Directed by

Written by

Sound design by

Stage Management/project support

Youth Theatre Coordinator

Julia Samuels

Curtis Watt, Julia Samuels and the cast

Keith Saha

Tessa Buddle

Anisa Saleh

'On Me Onez' Development

The youth theatre spent several weeks developing ideas for a new musical called 'On Me Onez'. They devised scenes around the theme of being on your own and took part in skills workshops in:

- Acting
- Masked performance
- Writing poetry/ rap
- Creating characters



Community Collaborations

Creative writing project. Led by local poet Curtis Watt for young people at The Academy of St Francis of Assisi and Edge Hill Youth Club. Supported by Kensington Regeneration.

"All you are to me is a load of unanswered questions.

Not a father to look up to or teach me any lessons.

No happy family. No "hi honey I'm home!"

Just me and my sister left to cope on our own"

Extract from 'Dad' by student from The Academy of St Francis of Assisi

Introduction to Shakespeare. A collaboration with The Black-E. Participants explored the story and themes of Othello before going to see the RSC production and also took part in a question and answer session with actor Patrice Naiambana.

2009-10 Research and Development

Blackberry Trout Face

20 Stories High commissioned award-winning Liverpool playwright Laurence Wilson to write his first play for young audiences. This year we ran two research and development weekends enabling Laurence to work in detail on his script with the director, dramaturg and professional actors.

"I got a tremendous amount out of taking part in the development workshop. Just to have a reading of the play and hear the voices of the characters come alive was worth it. I could see straight away what was working and not working with the play and then the improvisations helped me restructure the whole thing and discover what I as a writer was trying to say about the world we live in."

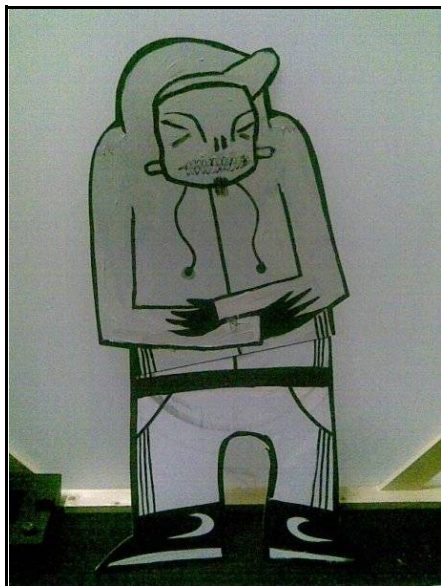
Laurence Wilson

The team:

Writer	Laurence Wilson	Actors	Nicola Bentley
Director	Julia Samuels		David Judge
Dramaturg	Phillip Osment		Joe Shipman

Hip-Hop Puppetry

Following the success of Babul and the Blue Bear, Director Keith Saha continued his development of hip-hop puppet theatre with a week-long stint at Contact Theatre, working with an international team of artists to present a work-in-progress called 'Ghost Boy'.



"I really loved the beat-boxing and the sound stuff – I've never seen anything like that before – it was amazing!"
Keith Rice, 20 Stories High Youth Theatre

"I've been working with gangs in Manchester and London for a number of years. And what was amazing about Ghost Boy is that it touched upon the mental health of the perpetrators of gang violence. Almost all of the agencies I have worked with send home a message of 'if you get caught you will go to prison.' Ghost Boy will really get these young people thinking and feeling about the long term psychological and emotional legacy of the crimes they might be committing"

Danny Fahey, Contact Creative Development Dept.

The team:

Director	Keith Saha
Actor/puppeteer	Everal A. Walsh
Actor/MC	Tachia Newall aka Truth MC
Actor/Dancer	Tochino Cornwell
Vocalist	Michelle Udogu aka Ebere
Beatboxer/sonic artist	Jason Singh
Visual Artist/maker	Sophie Coupas aka Sofiski
Puppeteer/maker	Andrew Kim
Cellist	Georgina Aasgaard
Dramaturg	Julia Samuels
Stage Manager	Becky Hillam



Advocacy Work

Get In International Theatre Conference

20 Stories High sent 15 delegates – a mixture of staff and youth theatre representatives – to this conference marking the culmination of the Arts Council’s YPPT initiative. An estimated 100 people attended our presentation, in which we shared best practice from our Pilot Project *Dark Star Rising*.

“Very positive work! I was really delighted to see so much raw talent being nurtured by this company. Keep it up!”

Feedback collected by Get In evaluation team

The Big Event

A week-long festival of workshops and performances for youth theatres in Merseyside. Julia Samuels ran a peer-learning workshop with other youth theatre practitioners exploring using authentic stories from young people. 15 people attended the workshop.

Sustained Theatre

Keith Saha is chair of the North West hub of Sustained Theatre, an initiative ensuring artists transform the future of our national arts landscape to reflect the culturally diverse, rich and vibrant talent that exists in British society.

Partners

Some of our key partnerships this year included:

Metal: we are theatre company in residence at this artists’ hub in Kensington, Liverpool and have been invited to relocate with them to the newly refurbished buildings at Edge Hill station

Urbeatz collaborated with us on *Dark Star Rising*

Liverpool Culture Company commissioned *Babul and the Blue Bear*

Contact as a co-producer, hosted the rehearsal, opening and press night of *Babul and the Blue Bear*, and our hip-hop puppetry development week

Horse and Bamboo Theatre collaborated with us on *Babul and the Blue Bear*

The Academy of St Francis of Assisi collaborated with us on a creative writing project

Novas Contemporary Urban Centre hosted our regular youth theatre sessions

Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse hosted our research and development and rehearsed reading of *Blackberry Trout Face*

The Black-E hosted several youth theatre sessions and collaborated with us on an Introduction to Shakespeare project

We also continued to develop and strengthen our relationships with other partners including: Edge Hill Youth Club, Hope Street Ltd, Yambi Africa, Merseyside Youth Theatre Development Forum, Kensington Regeneration, Kensington Fields Community Centre, Liverpool Community College, Shorefields Technology College, FUSE, Liverpool Lantern Company, Contacting The World, First Take, Knowsley MBC, Tameside MBC, Sefton MBC and Arts Council England

Funders

Statutory bodies and lottery distributors

Arts Council England

Awards for All

Liverpool Culture Company

Other public funding

Kensington Regeneration

Donators

Kate Samuels

Trusts and foundations

Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

PH Holt Foundation

Granada Foundation

North West Playwrights

European distributors

Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services

Expanding Horizons

Move on Up

People

Staff

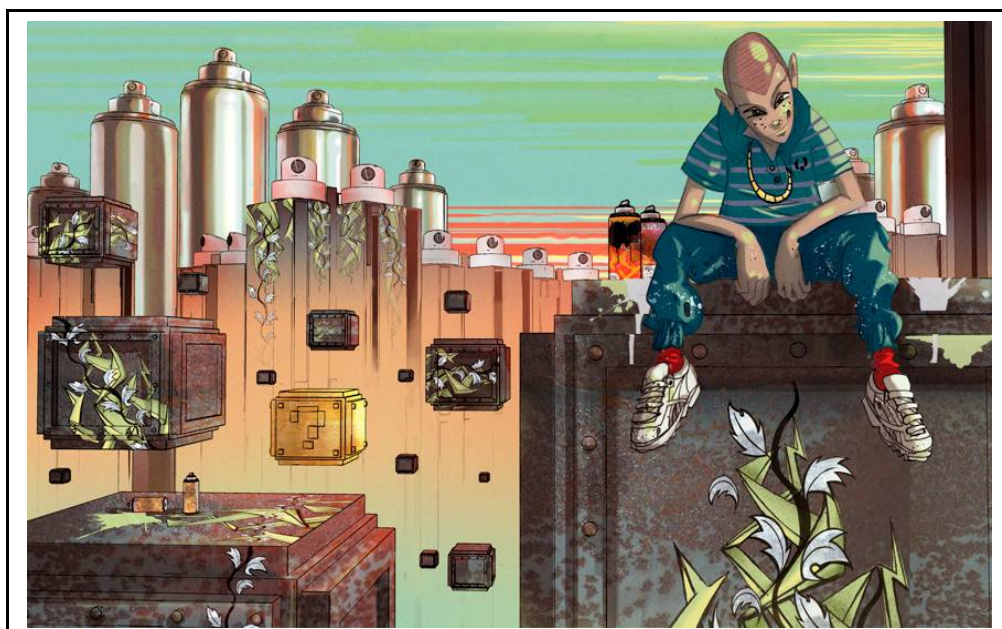
Co-Artistic Director – Julia Samuels
Co-Artistic Director – Keith Saha
Administration and Finance Manager – Nicki Green
Youth Theatre Coordinator – Anisa Saleh
Administrator/Project Support – Tessa Buddle

Board Members

Colette Bailey
Arlene Blanchard
Louie Ingham
Kim Johnson
Keith Saha
Julia Samuels
Rebecca Vipond (Chair)

Additional Freelance Staff

Catherine Conway
Andrew Gledhill
Darren Hart
Andrew Lowe
Alex McDonald
Carolyn Murray
Andrew Tunney
Tom Vipond
Sam Yates



Statistics

Number of performances	37
Number of audience members	1967
Number of workshops	90
Number of individual participants	1428
Number of participant-sessions	2601

Image credits

Page 1: 'Kaos' by Andrew Tunney

Page 2: 'LaTeisha' by Andrew Tunney

Pages 4-5: *Babul and the Blue Bear* production shots.

Photos by Robert Day

Page 6: *Dark Star Rising* production shot.

Photo by Anton Rodriguez

Page 7: Image of 6 Marmaduke Street.

Photo by Julia Samuels

Page 7: *On Me Onez* production shot.

Photo by Barry Han

Page 8: *Ghost Boy* 2-D puppet and mask by

Andrew Kim and Sofiski

Page 10: 'Daz' by Andrew Tunney