

20 stories high



Courtney Hayles and Tachia Newall in Ghost Boy – photography Robert Day

Annual Report 2009 – 2010



Thanks to the City of Liverpool for its financial support

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company number: 5841963



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 culturally diverse communities, 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. We work locally, regionally and nationally.

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:

- **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**



Tachia Newall in Ghost Boy. Photography :Robert Day

Statement from the Co-Artistic Directors

This year saw the aspirations and ambition of 20 Stories High reaching new heights. With two new touring shows, and an array of participatory projects, the year saw the company go from strength to strength.

In autumn 2009 we toured **Blackberry Trout Face** by award-winning writer Laurence Wilson. This was the first time that Laurence had written specifically for young audiences. Blackberry Trout Face was also 20 Stories High's first ever commissioned play, and we were very proud that it later went on to win the Brian Way Award 2010: a UK-wide award for best new play for young people. Blackberry Trout Face toured to schools, youth clubs and theatre venues in the North West

In spring 2010, we toured **Ghost Boy** a Hip-Hop Theatre piece with masks and puppetry. This groundbreaking new play, written and directed by Keith, toured nationally to small to mid-scale venues. Ghost Boy was co-produced by Contact and Birmingham Rep, and again was a resounding success with audiences, venues and critics alike.

Running alongside our touring productions, our Youth Theatre also had their busiest year. Our new Participation Co-ordinator Eliza joined us, collaborating with us on an eclectic range of projects. The year's activity included our Hip-Hop musical **On Me Onez**, a film with visual artists Liz Harry and Gavin Wood, and the Youth Theatre's first venture into the world of scripted plays.

In addition, 20 Stories High Youth Theatre were selected to be one of the groups to participate in the international Youth Theatre Festival **Contacting the World**. As part of the project, we have been twinned with Iranian theatre company 84Theater, and are currently working together on devising new pieces of theatre for July.

The development of our leadership skills was also on the agenda. In June we learnt that we had been successful in being awarded a grant from the Cultural Leadership Programme for **The New**. Through The New, 20 Stories High, together with four other regional cultural organisations, are exploring and developing innovative models of leadership.

2009-10 has been our busiest and most successful year. Artistically, we explored new ground: working with a wide range of artists and young people. We also reached a wider range of new audiences and participants - who were inspired and moved by the plays we produced, and the workshops we led.

The growth of 20 Stories High this year has provided many opportunities and challenges. One of the key legacies is that we are entering the new year with a programme of Organisational Development. We are already looking forward to engaging with a range of partners and individuals in order to build a company which will be strong and resilient into the future.

Finally, we would like to thank all our partners, artists, audiences and participants for helping us make the year so enormously successful.

Julia Samuels and Keith Saha
April 2010

BLACKBERRY TROUT FACE

by Laurence Wilson
Winner of the 2010 TC Brian Way Award



Kerrie sets about her daily task of preparing Mum's heroin...

Jakey has just about had enough of life in a gang...

Cameron is too scared to step outside the front door...

One morning, the three teenagers discover a note in the Frosties – Mum has abandoned them: they have been left home alone...

Blackberry Trout Face is a bold, gritty and funny play, which explores the universal themes of family, loyalty and ambition. With sharply-drawn characters, crackling dialogue and plenty of humour, we follow three young people as they struggle to cope in exceptional circumstances.

"If you miss this play you will kick yourself." (Paul Ware, Knotty Ash Youth Centre)

"I wish I'd seen it before I got into trouble" (young person with Knowsley Youth Offending team)

"I absolutely loved every minute of it. I would watch it again and again - it was amazing" (Paula, aged 15, audience member)

"Blackberry Trout Face is pure genius." (Student Direct Magazine: 4.5 stars)



"This play not only showed great skill and playwriting craft, layering unforgettable images in a truly unpredictable and riveting story, but also hooked us emotionally. The characters were believable, growing and totally lovable. There was sunshine and sparkle in this play and we loved going along Jake, Cameron and Kerrie's journey as they built their bridges and sewed their family together." (Brian Way Award Judging Panel)



Leon Tagoe in Blackberry Trout Face. Photography: Robert Day

The Tour

BLACKBERRY TROUT FACE toured to 24 schools and youth clubs in Merseyside in October and November 2010, this included a week-long residency in Knowsley MBC.

We also toured to a number of small-scale regional theatre venues.

Public Performances

Unity Theatre Liverpool - 29th–30th September

The Met Bury - 14th October

SPACE Bootle - 18th November

Rose Theatre Ormskirk - 19th November

The Brindley Runcorn - 24th November

Contact Manchester - 25th - 27th November

Outreach and Participation

Young people were involved in creative opportunities throughout the process and tour. This included:

- Youth Theatre involvement in script development workshops and readings
- Youth Theatre involvement in design development workshops
- **Write a Play... with 20 Stories High** - a weekend playwrighting course for young writers
- Post-show drama workshops in schools and youth clubs with the director, writer and actors
- A week-long residency with young people in Knowsley
- Post-show Q&A sessions at every venue

Every audience member received a free copy of **BOUNCE** - a mini-magazine/programme, containing articles relating to the themes, signposting to advice and guidance provision, as well as information about the actors and production.

“One of many great things I love about out 20 Stories High is the emphasis on ensuring audience members have an opportunity to reflect on issues/characters/ stories after the performance through Q&A sessions. I have witnessed some truly magical moments when local residents have discussed issues with the cast and other audience members. Through this unique opportunity of a performance and then debate, peoples perspectives have positively altered right there and then. This process is so powerful. Members of the Community have been so impressed and inspired by the company that they want to be a part of the magic, and rushed to get contact details.” (Leanne Jones, Knowsley MBC)

The Team

Actors	Nicola Bentley (Kerrie) Shaun Mason (Jakey) Leon Tagoe (Cameron)	Fight Designer	Bret Younis
		Workshop Leaders	Eliza Brittles, Tessa Buddle, Curtis Watt
Director	Julia Samuels	Producers	Julia Samuels and Keith Saha
Writer	Laurence Wilson	Production Manager	Ben Johnstone
Designer	Sophia Lovell Smith	Stage Manager	Maria Baker
Sound Designer	Keith Saha	ASMs	Paul Evans, Ste Cropper
Lighting Design	Phil Saunders	Set build	Lobster Productions
Dramaturg	Philip Osment	Production Photos	Robert Day
		Administration	Tessa Buddle

GHOST BOY

by Keith Saha

A co-production with Contact and Birmingham Rep



Tachia Newall in Ghost Boy. Photography: Robert Day

JAMAL is a boy who holds a deep, dark secret... Forever being haunted by his beast-like demons....

DENNIS is a taxi driver who is fed up with the 'hoodies' on the estate, and is on a one-man mission to clean it up

When they meet, they realise there is more to each other than meets the eye...

Will the secret of GHOST BOY be revealed?

Fusing Hip-Hop Theatre, mask and puppetry, with live cell and beatbox, Ghost Boy is an anarchic, unique and challenging piece of theatre.

"Rarely is a play so fresh seen on the Liverpool Stage. Their performances are first rate, the script economical, witty and in command of its subject matter. An absolute triumph." 10/10. (Liverpool Echo)

*"Ghost Boy aims to introduce new audiences to theatre – it will leave them with high expectations that many other companies will be unable to meet". (Liverpool Daily Post) ******

"It's rare to discover a piece of innovative theatre, performed by a relatively young company, which restores your faith in theatre pertinent to contemporary times." (The Stage)

"One of the best pieces, I've seen – with techniques I never even thought were possible. The ending was boss – it really made you think" (Bradley, aged 17, audience member)

The Tour

Contact Manchester 3rd – 13th March

Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 24th - Sat 27th March

New Wolsey Theatre Ipswich 29th - Tue 30th March

Bernie Grant Arts Centre, London 1st – 3rd April

Curve Leicester 13th – 17th April

Everyman Theatre Liverpool 20th – 24th April

Outreach and Participation

Young people were involved in creative opportunities throughout the process and tour. This included:

- Youth Theatre involvement in research and development workshops and sharings
- Workshops and residencies in schools and youth clubs nationally, led by the actors
- **GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE** a participatory post-show club night at Birmingham Rep and Liverpool Everyman
- An Urban Arts Taster day in partnership with Liverpool Everyman Playhouse
- Post-show Q&A sessions with the actors and director at every venue

The Team

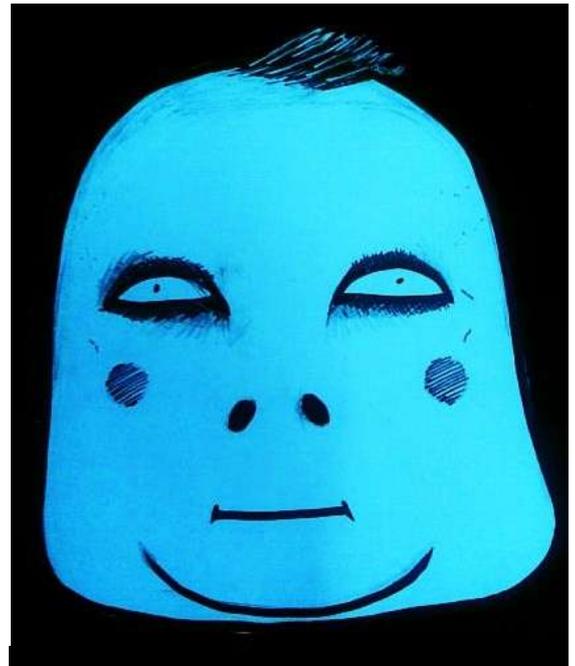
Performers: Tachia Newall (Jamal)
Everal A. Walsh (Dennis)
Courtney Hayles (Michael)
Hobbit (Beatboxer)
Hannah Marshall (Cellist)

Writer/Director: Keith Saha
Designers: Jo Pocock and Sofiski
Lighting Designers: Mark Distin & Paul Colley
Sound Designer: Simon Moloney
Dramaturg: Philip Osment
Associate Artist: Julia Samuels

Producers: Julia Samuels and Keith Saha
Production Adviser: Graham Lister for Artbuilding Ltd
Stage Manager: Richard Walker
Assistant Stage Managers: Dean Biddell, Dorian.
Set built by: Lobster Productions
Production Photographer: Robert Day
Trailer Produced by: Richard Ramchurn

Administration: Richard Hall and Natasha Selden
Participation Co-ordinator: Eliza Brittles
Projects Co-ordinator: Tessa Buddle

Co-producers:
Jo Topping (Contact), Raidene Carter (Birmingham Rep)



From top: photography by Sophie Choupas; Julia Samuels; Robert Day

YOUTH THEATRE

On Me Onez

This hip-hop musical with masks explored the theme of being on your own...

...When do we need other people?

...When do we want to be on our own?

The youth theatre devised the show, collaborating with artistic directors Julia and Keith. Artistically, the experiment with form was a response to 20 Stories High's 2008 production **Babul and the Blue Bear**.

Performance Dates: 10th and 11th July 2009



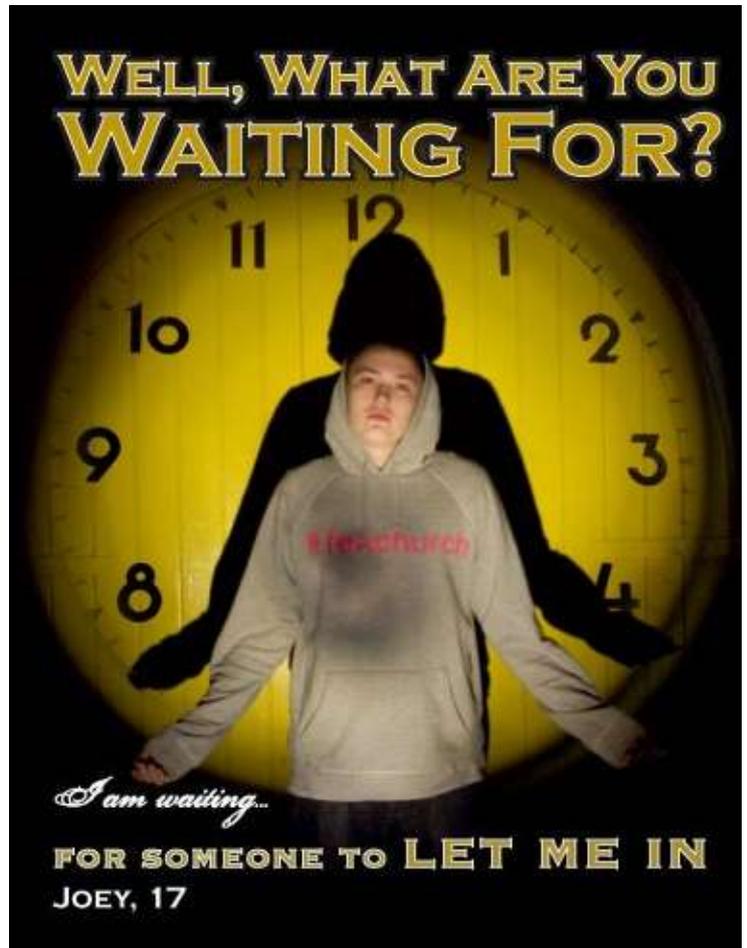
Photography: Barry Han

Peer pressure that kids have to go through these days – people having to conform to fit into certain groups and that – that was a big issue that touched down with me – because as a young male – that has a relevance to how it is on the streets. That was definitely real.

I saw innovative things I've never seen in theatre before.

One Me Onez – audience comments

Well, What Are You Waiting



Design- Liz Harry; Photography - Gavin Wood.

20 Stories High Youth Theatre arrived at the waiting room of the oldest passenger railway station in the world....

Edge Hill, Liverpool

Once there, they met artists Liz Harry and Gavin Wood.

Then they imagined the people over the past 150 years who had waited there, what they might have waited for and who with.

We then asked them...

Well, what are you waiting for?

A series of 18 photographs, taken in the station, documents their responses

Other Youth Theatre Projects and Activities

Halloween Lantern Fair We created stalls and games as part of Liverpool Lantern Company's site-specific performance in St Luke's Church in October.

Script Work The youth theatre were introduced to script work, preparing short duologues from contemporary plays. The scenes were performed at an informal sharing in March.

Contacting the World The youth theatre were selected as one of twelve international companies to take part in this international youth theatre festival. We have been twinned with 84 Theater in Tehran. Each twin has begun to collaborate on devising shows, which will be performed in the twin's home city, and at the festival in Manchester in July 2010.

Museum of Liverpool Life Film. In collaboration with visual artists Liz Harry and Gavin Wood, we have created a short film and installation, which will be on semi-permanent display at the new Museum of Liverpool Life, when it opens in 2011.

Ghost Boy and Blackberry Trout Face Research and Development The Youth Theatre contributed to the development of the shows, attending workshops, readings and sharings through the development processes of the touring shows.

Arts Awards 8 of our youth theatre are working towards their Bronze Arts Award.

Youth Advisory Group Representatives from the youth theatre meet termly, contributing to the management and planning of the youth theatre with 20 Stories High staff.

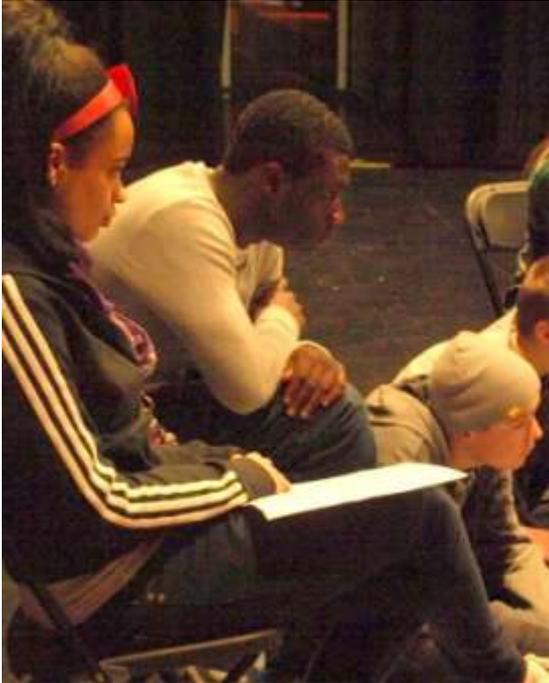
When I started the youth theatre, I was really shy – I couldn't go into a room full of people and speak to them. Now, being in the youth theatre has given me loads of confidence. (Catherine aged 15, Youth Theatre member)



From Top Left, clockwise: Halloween Lantern Parade; Laurence Wilson with the youth theatre in Blackberry Trout Face development workshop; Contacting the World devising workshop. Photography: Julia Samuels

Write a Play... with 20 Stories High

Young Playwrights Project (Pilot)



Photography: Julia Samuels

Writer Philip Osment joined Co-Artistic Director Julia Samuels, Participation Co-ordinator Eliza Brittles and 14 young people on a weekend playwrighting course in March. Participants spent the weekend learning about the craft of playwrighting, and making a start at writing their own short plays. Based on the success of the pilot, we are planning to develop the idea and start a regular young playwrighting programme in 2011.

"The weekend was a real joy"

"The three practitioners were amazing. They were very knowledgeable about what they were doing and teaching"

"I now have loads of ideas and feel that I have a massive heads up on how to structure a play better"

(feedback from participants)

Edge Hill Station: A New Home

October saw us move, with Metal, to our new offices at Edge Hill Station. Arts organisation Metal have hosted 20 Stories High's office since the company's inception. Metal refurbished the buildings on the platform at Edge Hill Station – the world's first passenger railway station. The buildings have been converted into a multi-use arts space, as well as offices for creative organisations.

As well as providing us office space, we have also begun to use the space for creative projects: the history, buildings and backdrops provided the inspiration and location for our youth theatre project **Well, What are you Waiting For?**



The Edge Hill Station launch. Photography: Brian Slater

The New



The New Launch at Contact. Photography: Barry Priest

20 Stories High are working on The New with a consortium of partners: Contact, the Whitworth Art Gallery, Zion Arts Centre and the Chinese Arts Centre. Funded by the Cultural Leadership Programme, **The New**, is a programme which will interrogate, explore and develop leadership skills within the five organisations.

The New was launched at Contact Theatre in November. Within the programme, senior managers through to emerging leaders are engaged in a range of training and development initiatives, including coaching, mentoring and creating innovative leadership experiments. The project will continue into 2011.

Advocacy

Sustained Theatre

During this year Keith was asked by ACE to be chair of the North West hub of Sustained Theatre. Sustained Theatre keeps issues relating to Black, Asian and minority ethnic theatre artists and practitioners alive and on the national agenda. It also develops leadership, encourages critical debate, creates international links & builds national archives. Over this period Keith contributed to the shift of moving Sustained Theatre away from being an Arts Council initiative to becoming an independent movement its own right. He also visited Grahamstown Theatre Festival in South Africa: in order to make connections with the country, the festival and other artists - as well to promote the work of Sustained Theatre, 20 Stories High, and UK and North West Black Arts Organisations.

Cultural Organisations of Liverpool

20 Stories High are actively involved in COoL – a collective of small and medium sized arts organisations in Liverpool.

The collective all believe strongly in: the arts, innovation, participation, delivering quality work and services and in the importance of partnership, dialogue and communication in driving forward effective cultural strategies and practises.

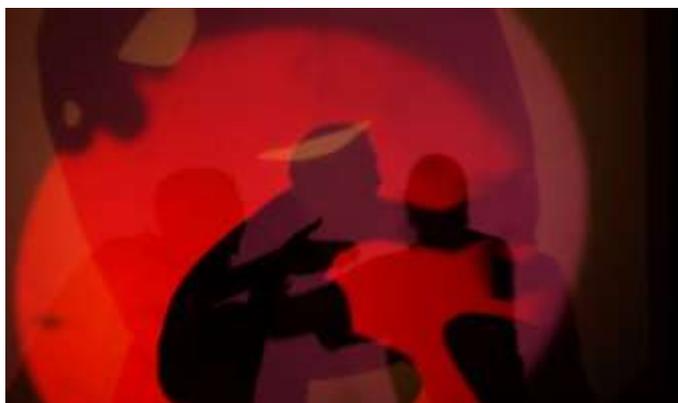
The COoL collective aims to be an empowered collective which has the strength, recognition and ability to secure tenders, consortium bids and actively keeps up to date with developments and opportunities within the city.



Grahamstown Arts Festival. Photography: Keith Saha

Statistics

Number of performances	80
Number of workshops	127
Number of audience members	8578
Number of participants	4237



Partners

We are grateful to the following funding partners who have made our work possible:

Arts Council England
Liverpool City Council
Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
Trusthouse Foundation
Cultural Leadership Programme
PH Holt Charitable Trust
Merseyside Police

Metal (support in-kind)
Novas Scarman Contemporary Urban Centre (support in-kind)
Virgin Trains (support in-kind)
North West Playwrights
Knowsley MBC
Kate Samuels

Some of our other key partnerships this year included: Contact, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Novas Scarman Contemporary Urban Centre, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, Liverpool Lantern Company, Action Transport Theatre Company, 84 Theater – Tehran, Whitworth Art Gallery, Chinese Arts Centre, Zion Arts Centre, Squash Nutrition, Dolphin Studios, Hope Street Ltd, FUSE, Sefton MBC, St Helen's MBC, Theatre Centre, Tiata Fahodzi, St Francis of Assisi City Academy, Sutton Sports College, St Julie's Catholic High School.

Staff

Core Staff

Co-Artistic Director – Julia Samuels
Co-Artistic Director – Keith Saha
Projects Co-ordinator – Tessa Buddle
Administrators – Richard Hall and Natasha Selden
Participation Co-ordinator – Eliza Brittles
Youth Theatre Coordinator – Anisa Saleh

Board Members

Colette Bailey (until October09)
Arlene Blanchard
Louie Ingham
Kim Johnson
Keith Saha
Julia Samuels (Secretary)
Rebecca Vipond (Chair)
Lateefah Wainwright-Owoo (from July 09)

Additional Freelance Staff

Andrew Tunney, Ben Johnstone, Brett Yount, Calum Clark, Courtney Hayles, Curtis Wattt, David Judge, Dean Biddle, Everal Walsh, Gavin Wood, Graham Lister, Hannah Marshall, Jack Hobbs, Jason Crouch, Jo Pocock, Laurence Wilson, Leon Tagoe, Liz Harry, Mark Distin, Nicola Bentley, Paul Colley, Phil Saunders, Philip Osment, Richard Ramchurn, Richard Walker, Robert Day, Sam Yates, Samuel Kent, Sarah Han, Sarah Ojapah, Shaun Mason, Simon Moloney, Sophia Lovell Smith, Sophie Choupas, Tachia Newall, Tochino Cornwell, Tom Dexter Scott