

20 STORIES HIGH

Annual Report
2013 - 14





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1. Welcome from the Co-Artistic Directors

2013/14 has been a very busy and ambitious year for 20 Stories High.

In autumn 2013, we toured our brand new show: *Melody Loses Her Mojo*, a bold, gritty and challenging story following the amazing journeys of three remarkable young people whose stories intertwine in a world full of magical and surreal moments. *Melody* was written and directed by Keith Saha, and featured a unique blend of Hip Hop Theatre, Dance, Puppetry, Mask, traditional text and song, with live beat boxing and cello. *Melody* toured to mid-scale venues as a co-production with Liverpool Everyman Playhouse and Leicester Curve.

Alongside the production, artists collaborated with young people through a wide range of engagement activities, from pre-show performances and post-show jams to fusion workshops and residencies. Our Young Actors Company were involved in an exchange project with young people from Leicester Curve and Young Everyman Playhouse, creating and sharing their own devised performances in response to *Melody*.

The core participation programme ran throughout the year, with weekly Youth Theatre and Young Actors Company sessions and regular Youth Advisory Group meetings. Highlights included physical theatre shows *Grounded* (created by Tim Lynskey – Big Wow Theatre Company – and the Young Actors) and *Crashed* (created by Elinor Randle – Tmesis Theatre Company – and the Youth Theatre); a Youth Advisory Group organised residential weekend in Derbyshire; and *Future Jam* – a pop-up performance as part of the Royal Exchange's FutureWorlds project.

We have also been developing projects which will come to fruition next year. We've been developing our 2012 Young Actors Company show *Tales from the Mp3*, which we are going to tour nationally in summer 2014, paying our young actors as professionals for the first time. And we have started work on a new collection of contemporary urban monologues – *Headz* – which Keith is writing for the Young Actors to perform in the summer.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our amazing staff team, who work incredibly hard to make all this happen; the young people and artists we collaborate with for all the ideas and inspiration; and our brilliant collection of partners and funders – who make it possible to keep the work blossoming in really challenging times.

Keith Saha and Julia Samuels
December 2014

2. Welcome from the Chair

Coming into post as Chair during 2013/14, Board development has been high on my agenda. Ensuring the Trustee body is fit for purpose, and reflective of the organisation it serves, was a key factor. We began recruiting new members with the skills, experience, willingness and outlook required to adequately support the organisation on the next part of its journey.

We have been operating in economically challenging times and subsequently income generation, partnership working and profile-raising have been recurrent themes throughout the year. The climate in which we find ourselves has been a catalyst in our need to work smarter and be increasingly prudent with our resources.

One thing that hasn't changed is keeping young people at the heart of 20 Stories High; and they have stepped forward to meet the challenge of generating income to support their activities. We began working on bringing our Trustees closer to our young people.

The representation and contribution of young people on the Board remained in place and Trustees continued to attend Youth Theatre and Young Actors Company performances. During the year we started discussing Trustee attendance at Youth Advisory Group meetings, workshops and rehearsals.

Throughout the year we continued to lay the foundations from which the organisation can remain vibrant and intact until there is more stability within both the cultural and economic environment. The next few years will be crucial in how we fortify that foundation and future-proof our work, the organisation and our legacy.

Yvonne Hepburn-Foster

December 2014



3. Who We Are

20 Stories High is an award-winning theatre company based in Liverpool, led by Co-Artistic Directors Julia Samuels and Keith Saha.

We create dynamic, challenging theatre which attracts new, young and diverse audiences. Working with the narrative and artistic influences of the young people we collaborate with - we are passionate about pushing the boundaries of what theatre is. With a mix of professional productions and participation projects, we cross over artforms to develop new ones, nurture new writing and involve our audiences at every stage of the theatre making process.

20 Stories High was established in 2006. Our work is culturally diverse and artistically ambitious. In 2012, 20 Stories High was made a National Portfolio Organisation by Arts Council England.

We are seen as one of the most exciting theatre companies in the North of England – and as a leading young people’s company nationally.

Awards & Nominations

Whole by Philip Osment

2013 *Writers Guild of Great Britain* Best Play for Young People

Ghost Boy by Keith Saha

2011 *Brian Way Award* for UK’s Best New Play for Young People

2010 *Liverpool Daily Post* Arts Award for Best Touring Production

Blackberry Trout Face by Laurence Wilson

2010 *Brian Way Award* for UK’s Best New Play for Young People

2009 Shortlisted for *Manchester Evening News* for Best New Play

4. National Touring: Melody Loses Her Mojo

The Show

Melody Loses Her Mojo was a new piece, written and directed by Keith Saha.

It was a bold, gritty and challenging story following the amazing journeys of three remarkable young people whose stories intertwine in a world full of magical and surreal moments. The story was told through an exciting, innovative and unique blend of Hip Hop Theatre, Dance, Puppetry, Mask, traditional text and song, with live beat boxing and cello.

This was a co-production with Liverpool Everyman Playhouse and Leicester Curve, opening at the Playhouse in Liverpool and touring to mid-scale national venues September–November 2013.

We received fantastic feedback from audiences, venue-partners, theatre professionals and the press.



Creative Team

Writer and Director	Keith Saha
Designer	Kate Unwin
Puppetry Consultant	Sue Buckmaster
Associate Director	Julia Samuels

Cast

Melody	Remmie Milner
Rizla	Darren Kuppan
Blessing	Simone James
Jeff/Puppeteer	Samuel Dutton
Jackie/Puppeteer	Zoe Hunter
Beatboxer	Hobbit
Cellist	Hannah Marshall

"It's not easy to suggest that the toughest teenager may conceal the most vulnerable child, but this play has it in the bag." **The Guardian, Alfred Hickling**

"A triumph... spectacular... There is an attitude, a lyricism and a sharp observational humour in [Keith] Saha's writing that you don't get to see and hear every day... This play's ability to make you laugh one minute and be on the verge of tears the next is the mark of great theatre... There are few, if any, writers and companies around that can compete with this bunch: catch them while you can. 10/10" **Marc Waddington, Liverpool Echo**

"Probably one of the best pieces of theatre I have ever seen!!! Lovedddd #melodyloseshermojo" @AminatakamaraUD, via Twitter

Engagement Activities

Running alongside the tour, was an extensive and far-reaching engagement programme, where young people collaborated with a range of artists through a range of activities including:

Wrap-Around Performances at Liverpool Playhouse included a wide variety of community, youth and schools groups performing before and after each show.

Post Show Jam events at Liverpool Playhouse, Leicester Curve and the Key Theatre offered local groups, schools and artists the chance to share, enjoy and support each other's work alongside the performers from the show.

National Young Ambassadors Programme: Young people in local venues took on responsibilities and worked with venue staff to organise events, build key skills and market the show to their peers locally.

Youth Theatre Exchange Project enabled five groups from Liverpool, Wirral and Leicester to work towards a shared goal, supporting each other and culminating in a sharing of pieces made in response to *Melody Loses Her Mojo* at The Key, Peterborough.

University Academy project: Anita Welsh and Bradley Thompson led a six week after-school project for young people at our partner school University Academy linked to the themes and artforms from *Melody*. For most of the young people this was their first time engaging in a theatre project, and first time performing.

INSET Training Day: We ran our first ever INSET day with teachers to build on key skills and resources linked to the themes and artistic forms of the show.

Play Day brought together artists from national venues and organisations to share work and ideas around Melody themes and art forms.

Take Over project at The Key Theatre, Peterborough in collaboration with local artists was a great success, including urban art and drama workshops in schools, youth groups and before each show.

"I have two very disengaged students who are EAL (English as an additional language) who... went from kissing their teeth to actually producing a brilliant little sketch with their puppet! The boys were supposed to be coming to watch the show so that they could write their GCSE live evaluation coursework - neither boy was planning on bothering - but after the workshop they both came and one even performed at the post show jam! Result!"

Louise Sampson, Drama Teacher, The Voyager Academy, Peterborough

5. Participation Programme

Participation is at the heart of everything 20 Stories High does. We engage young people living in some of the most deprived and excluded areas of the country. We capture imaginations, raise aspirations and provide opportunities to debate the most urgent issues in young people's lives through engagement with high-quality, thought provoking and entertaining live performance, participatory activities and digital media. We support young people who have interest in the arts but might lack the confidence, support and financial means to get involved in activities and access further training.

Youth Theatre

A weekly group for 13-21 year olds, who participated in skills workshops, and created two new performances: Crashed and Future Jam.

"I think I speak for everyone who's truly dedicated when I say it really is a privilege to be part of such an organisation, and thank you to the staff and members alike for being part of such an astounding, unified, gathering of people. Taking your time to do something like this can have a much bigger impact than I ever would have thought until now."
(Youth Theatre member)

Crashed

Director Elinor Randle (Tmesis Theatre Company) and Sam Ikpeh (emerging artist) collaborated with 20 Stories High Youth Theatre to create a coming-of-age tale following a group of teenagers in the wake of a terrible tragedy. The show focused on physical theatre and abstract storytelling, which was a new experience for the group. Both performances sold out at the Cornerstone Theatre in Liverpool in July.



Future Jam

Julia Samuels worked with the group to create a pop-up performance Future Jam, exploring whether we live for the moment or what's to come. Future Jam was performed in November in Manchester, as part of the Royal Exchange's Truth about Youth Festival.

Young Actors Company

A weekly group for 17-25 year olds, who participated in advanced skills development workshops and created new production *Grounded*. YAC were also involved in an exchange project as part of the *Melody Loses Her Mojo* participation programme, bringing together three groups from Merseyside and two groups from Leicester to create response pieces that they performed at Leicester Curve.

Since January 2014 YAC have been working on a series of contemporary monologues, *Headz*, written by Keith Saha, which will be performed in July 2014. And YAC members from *Tales from the MP3* (2012) will be invited to tour a re-work of *Tales from the Mp3* in Summer 2014.

Grounded

20 Stories High's Young Actors Company worked with Tim Lynskey (Big Wow Theatre Company) on their summer 2013 show *Grounded*.

They created a show following the lives, loves and losses of people stranded at an airport terminal when all the flights are cancelled. The rehearsal room was filled with laughter as they devised stories and characters, and resulted in a fun and moving show.

The show was sold out on all four of its performances at the Bluecoat.

"Jack was a young man who was at risk from disengagement; he comes from a local family who are struggling. Through his involvement in 20 Stories High, I have seen his confidence grow, and he has become known in our local community as someone who will speak up in a positive way, and who younger people who look up to." **Councillor Ian Francis – the participant's name has been changed**



Youth Advisory Group

A monthly group that involves young people in decision-making across 20 Stories High. Highlights include a summer residential in Derbyshire, fundraising events ('Play in a Day' & ASDA bag pack) and presenting at 20 Stories High AGM for the first time.

Outreach Projects

Alongside our regular groups, we run local and national outreach projects:

Puppetry Project: Zoe Hunter, *Melody Loses Her Mojo* Puppeteer, ignited young people's interest and curiosity for puppeteering at a mixture of school and community workshops (Jan 2013).

Youth Theatre Arts Scotland invited 20 Stories High to lead workshops as part of their Interchange Youth Leaders Training weekend in Aberdeen.

Open workshops: This year we have seen an incredible increase in the number of young people coming along to our one off creative open workshops.

Training and Accreditation

We have had 30 volunteers, two fantastic full time placement students, Ezequiel Serrano and Jasmin Parsons (September - December 2013) and Bradley Thompson was our Assistant Director for 2014.

Other Activities

We have also been busy with...

...8 theatre trips

...Performances at Liverpool's annual Light Night

...Live radio shows aired on local station Beat FM

...A 'Dinner & Debate' evening

...Participating in The Big Event – a weekend of performances and workshops in partnership with nine other local Youth Theatre groups

Case Study



Odile joined 20 Stories High right at the start of the company in 2008 after taking part in a workshop at her school, University Academy (formerly Shorefields High School). Odile is from a family of 5 and was born in Cameroon. When she was 8, her family had to make the difficult decision to migrate to the UK due to the complex political situation in her home country.

'It was a big change to my life and my family. English is my first language and I felt happy and settled in my new home in the UK, but moving so far away from your own country still has an impact on you, especially at a young age. England was not my first choice but now everything is cool.'

Since being part of 20 Stories High's Participation Programme, Odile's confidence has blossomed: *'I've seen a big growth in myself. I used to refuse point blank to do something if I felt uncomfortable but now I accept the challenge and face my fears. Only last week I read a whole 20 minute monologue in front of the other young actors – it was really hard, I'm not a very confident reader at all – but it felt really good to push myself to do it.*

I'm so much more confident now than I used to be. The first week you come, you're like, what IS this? But then you let your guard down and you learn so much and become part of a family. I left for a bit but missed that bond and the support so much that I decided to rejoin.'

Since joining 20 Stories High, Odile has worked on numerous projects, performances and festivals in Liverpool. The Participation Programme has offered opportunities to connect with young people on a national and global scale through participation in festivals such as Contacting the World at Contact, Manchester:

'20 Stories isn't just about putting on a play. We get the chance to meet other groups at post-show jams and in workshops and we get to perform at big festivals. I've seen loads of theatre shows and have learnt loads of new skills such as spoken word, verbatim theatre and the actor's process for creating character. And the opportunities are getting better: we're taking our show Tales From the MP3 on a national tour – this is the first time we'll be getting paid to perform!'

Odile has also learnt new life skills since being with 20 Stories High and now aspires to study Fashion Design at University:

'20 Stories High offer us loads of support outside of rehearsals. The staff have made me realise I am good enough to apply for University and have helped me with the application and interview process – without them I wouldn't have even contemplated attempting to apply.'

But being part of 20 Stories High isn't just about going to Youth Theatre every week. After watching the premiere of WHOLE (2013), Odile posted on Facebook:

'Show 2nite was so breath taking... Was soo speechless... this makes me want to act more and in different places to show them what young people can do... 1 word AMAZING.'

6. Partnerships

Partnership working is key to the development and success of 20 Stories High. This year we have continued to develop relationships with venues, networks and social partners.

Our co-production with Liverpool Everyman Playhouse and Leicester Curve was a significant achievement in the last year. Liverpool Everyman Playhouse is especially keen to continue to work closely with us and has booked ***Tales from the MP3***, our summer 2014 tour for the new Everyman space.

Our relationships with the Key in Peterborough has developed into an especially good model around participation and audience development and the Octagon in Bolton want to continue working with us to develop their young audiences. Both venues especially value the positive impact participation activities such as post-show jams have on local groups.

Other key partner venues are: Contact Theatre, Manchester; The Garage, Norwich; Unicorn Theatre, London; The Albany, Deptford; Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield;

In Liverpool, we are a member of the Executive Committee of COoL, a network of small to medium sized creative organisations and also represent COoL at LARC meetings (a network of the larger creative organisations in Liverpool).

Leanne Jones co-chairs the Merseyside Youth Theatre Forum. We are also developing new relationships with Youth Theatre development agencies in both the North of Ireland and Scotland, both of which have brought 20SH in to facilitate training for their youth theatre sectors.

In addition, we have established links with national social partners in relation to the participatory activities we offer with national tours, including The Albert Kennedy Trust, Childline, YoungMinds, Missing People, CAN (Community Arts North West) and Young Addaction.

7. Research & Development

In January 2014, Keith Saha started work on a series of monologues for the Young Actors Company, collectively named *Headz*. The monologues have a bold, urban and contemporary flavour, and are pieces that we will be able to bring to life easily in the future in different settings. For example, following the Young Actors' performance of them as their summer show, we will be taking some to libraries in St Helens and will then further develop one as a future touring piece.

We also did some workshops exploring abortion, pregnancy and parenthood with artists and young people, generating early ideas for a new project which will be developed next few years.

8. 2013/14 in Numbers

We performed a total of **31** professional shows

We performed **26** participatory shows

We facilitated **119** workshops

We performed at **4** festivals

Over **6900** audience members saw our work

Over **5200** participants engaged in workshops and activities

We worked with **30** volunteers and **43** artists



9. Company and Financial

20 Stories High is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. Our charitable objects are:

- To advance the education of the general public in the performing arts
- To advance in life and help young people through:
 - The provision of recreational and leisure time activities provided in the interest of social welfare, designed to improve their conditions of life;
 - Providing support and activities which develop their skills, capacities and capabilities to enable them to participate in society as mature and responsible individuals.

We achieve these objects through two main strands of work:

- Professional performances that tour to schools, youth clubs and theatres
- A range of equally high quality participatory activities that engage young people in their own creative and social development

Our financial result at the end of the financial year 2013/14 was:

- Total income of £308,282 (2012/13 £271,310)
- Total expenditure of £308,534 (2012/13 £281,408)
- Net surplus of £1,247 due to unrestricted funds brought forward

Reserves:

Although we are a charity operating on a not for profit basis, we endeavour, in order to provide for financial stability and sustainability, to develop and maintain a free reserve of £30,000 to sustain our operations over a period. Actual free reserves at 31 March 2014 were £15,204.

10. The Future

Tales from the MP3

A ground breaking new verbatim play where the young actors play each other

20 Stories High's Young Actors have been on a mission to find out the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth... about each other.

Playing each other and recounting the stories direct from MP3s live onstage; 20 Stories High Young Actors Company present a totally mesmerising new style of verbatim theatre.

Tales from the MP3 was created by the young actors of the company along with 20SH Co-Artistic Director Julia Samuels in 2012 and will be going on tour to Edinburgh Fringe and small-scale national venues in August 2014.



The Multiple Choices of Amy X

The Multiple Choices of Amy X (working title) is a new play in development exploring teenage abortion, pregnancy and parenthood.

Director Julia Samuels will lead a creative team through discussions and workshops with young people - some who have had abortions, some who are pregnant or are parents, and some who abstain from sex. The play will then be written, and developed with professional actors and will be touring nationally to schools and small scale theatre venues.

Broke

Co Artistic Director of 20 Stories High Keith Saha and Theatre Rites Artistic Director Sue Buckmaster join forces to create and develop a truly unique piece of theatre for young adult audiences. Blending Urban Arts such as beatboxing and slam poetry with puppetry they will go on a journey to explore what the real difficulties that face young people who are trying to fix what they think is *broke*.

Featuring International Beatboxing Champ Hobbit and a whole host of puppets with a very contemporary urban flavour, Broke will tour Spring 2016.

Participation

Our Liverpool-based core Participation Programme 2014–15 will include:

- **Youth Theatre:** working on creating a short performance piece, directed by Rachel Brogan, supported by emerging artist Bradley Thompson
- **Young Actors Company:** working on the Headz monologues, written by Keith Saha and directed by Julia Samuels and Keith Saha
- **Artist-led** workshops for shows in development
- **Open and Outreach Workshops** to engage new young people
- **Youth Advisory Group** sessions
- **Dinner'n'Debate, theatre trips, Arts Awards and other events**
- **Connecting with local, national and international festivals.**

Working with our national venue partners, we will also create bespoke participation projects, which interact with our national tour *Tales from the MP3*.

11. Thank You

Without the support of our funders, partners, young people, staff, board, volunteers, artists and freelancers, we couldn't achieve our ambitions with such success and energy.

So, a huge thank you to:

Our Funders and Donors

Arts Council England, Liverpool City Council, BBC Children in Need, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, PH Holt Trust, Kate Samuels, Ruth and David Samuels

Core Team

Julia Samuels, Keith Saha, Leanne Jones, Sarah Meath, Tina Taylor, Nathaniel Hall, Anita Welsh

Company Associates

Isobel Hawson, Tessa Buddle, Philip Osment and Curtis Watt

Board

Yvonne Hepburn-Foster, Rebecca Vipond, Kim Johnson, Lateefah Wainwright-Owoo, Trish Sangster, Anita Welsh, Curtis Watt and Jo Hemmant

Volunteers and Students

Yvette Sedley, Jamie Thompson, Mhairi Howison, Lisa Davis, Charli Parkin, Nicole May, Kirsty Luther, Lucy Graham, Lucy Stephan, Ezequiel Serrano-Perez, Jazmin Parsons, Holly Fellows, Raven Maguire, Rob Dunn, Owen Jones, Abby Melia, Alex Forest, Sarah Alexander, Jess Green, Katie Barnard, Katherine McDonald, Gordon Millar.

Freelancers

Emma Wright, Sarah-Jane Davis, Gareth Moss, Kate Benfield, Samuel Kent, Rachael Christie, Julie Guinan, Karl Llorca, Austin Hewitt

Artists

Keith Saha, Julia Samuels, Elinor Randle, Tim Lynskey, Philip Osment, Gavin Wood, Anita Welsh, Curtis Watt, Bradley Thompson, Sam Ikpeh, Sue Buckmaster, Remmie Milner, Darren Kuppen, Simone James, Samuel Dutton, Zoe Hunter, Jack Hobbs (aka Hobbit), Hannah Marshall, Kate Unwin, Mark Wigan, Kwesi Johnson, Tayo Akinbode, Douglas Kuhrt, Dan Steele, Matthew Xia, Keely Mills, Stuart Payn, George Farrell, Kieran Steels, Naomi Oppenheim, Alison Duddle, Robert Day, Wes Storey, Jacquie Davis, Rachel Farrell, Nicola Bentley, Graeme Lycett, Barry Hann, Joseph Adelakun, Keisha Thompson, Carla Henry, Rachel Brogan

Our Local and National Partners

COoL (Cultural Organisations of Liverpool), Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse, The Bluecoat, DaDa Fest, MPAC (Merseyside Play Action Council), YEP (Young Everyman Playhouse), Merseyside Youth Theatre Development Forum, Knowsley Council, Young Identity, Toxteth TV, University Academy Liverpool, Academy of St Francis of Assisi, LIPA (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts), Unity Theatre, Z-Arts, Tmesis, LCVS (Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services), Tell Tale Theatre Company, Altru Drama, Suitcase Ensemble, Off the Ground Theatre, Curious Minds, Unity Youth & Community Centre, Liverpool Youth Service, Anfield Community Arts, COAP (Children of Addicted Parents), Contact Theatre, Curve Theatre, Lawrence Batley Theatre, CAST, Vivacity Peterborough and The Key Theatre, 84 Theater, Cardboard Citizens, Bolton Octagon, The Royal Exchange, Albert Kennedy Trust, Freedom Studios, NAYT (National Association of Youth Theatres), STUN (Sustained Theatre), ITC (Independent Theatre Council), Youth Theatre Arts Scotland (YTAS), St Edwards College, South Wirral High School, St John Fisher Catholic High School, The Voyageur Academy, Peterborough Regional College,

And a final huge thank you to all of our audiences and participants!



Photo credits:

- Page 1:** Remie Milner, Melody Loses Her Mojo (2013) - Photograph by Robert Day
- Page 2 :** Jasmin Parsons, Future Jam Royal Exchange (2013) – Photograph by Joel Fildes
- Page 4:** Zoe Hunter and Remie Milner, Melody Loses Her Mojo (2013) - Photograph by Robert Day
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