



LIVERPOOL
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& PLAYHOUSE

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YEAR OF CULTURE 2023



Self Care Toolkit

For individuals who have seen, or are about to see the show

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Introduction

This self-care toolkit is designed for individuals who have seen, or are about to see our show, High Times & Dirty Monsters.

Within it, you will find information about the show (a detailed synopsis of what happens) and information about the themes. You will also find tips on how to look after yourself during the piece, and some signposting to organisations who can help if self-care is not enough.

About High Times & Dirty Monsters

The voice of young disabled people often goes unheard. But not anymore - this raucous, radical, celebratory, and hard-hitting hip hop gig theatre show shares the good times and the not so good times being young and disabled in 2023.

Funny, raw and surprising stories told by an amazing collective of actors, beatboxers, and dancers. With creative captioning, integrated sign language and integrated audio description.

Expect heavy beats, stunning visuals and full hearts.

Content Warning

The show is full of jokes, empowerment and feel-good moments but also explores challenging themes around ableism, homelessness, substance misuse, financial difficulties, and emotional trauma.

Contains strong language and gig level music. Resources will be available in person and on our website.

Age Guidance 14+

Self Care

We are really pleased that you have chosen to watch this show. In this performance we are dealing with difficult subjects. However, we hope that you will, in the end, find it a personally empowering experience. This toolkit has been designed to offer support to anyone engaging with the show, especially anyone who might be impacted by its content. We hope this toolkit provides you with specialist resources and tools from professionals that may help.

Take action if anything personal comes up for you

Theatre can bring us face to face with our own joys and struggles. This piece of theatre contains moments that may trigger difficult emotions. Here are some tips for things that you can do to look after yourself if this happens.

Tips – how to look after yourself

Make space for feelings: There may be times in the show where you feel strong emotions towards the characters or because of the content. This is understandable. Notice when this happens and take deep breaths to get you through those moments.

Remember your breath: If you become triggered, breathing is a great way to bring yourself back into a state of calm, lower your heart rate and create space in your brain to start thinking things through at an easier pace. Try breathing in for four seconds, holding your breath for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds and holding again. Repeat this for as long as you need until your breath feels in control again. Lots of mobiles and smart watches offer apps which can help you with this.

Watch with someone: Watch the show with someone that you would feel able to discuss the themes in the play with. Preferably someone who understands you well enough to notice what things might get to you the most. If you can't watch the show with someone you could make a plan to chat with someone about it afterwards. We will have an access and wellbeing table available front of house with a staff member should you like to speak to one of our team before or after the show. They will be mental health first aid trained.

Read a summary of the show: If you would like to know the content before you watch, so that there is nothing unexpected, you will find an overview of all the show and full synopsis of the piece on the next page.

Get help: If you need to take time out there will be a mental health first aider at every venue who you can talk to before, during or after the show.

There is also a signposting section at the end of this document for helplines and organisations who can help.

Synopsis

Note: the following description contains details of the show. Please see the content warning for information about subjects that may be mentioned.

SCENE 1

As the audience enters the space, energetic, bouncy, dubby instrumental hip hop music plays. The performers arrive on the stage, they mingle with the audience and say hello. Grace (musician) plays along with the pre-show music. The house lights dim and a big air horn sound stops the music.

SCENE 2

Joséphine stands up and introduces herself to the audience. She describes herself, what she's wearing and that she has a 'cheeky grin'. Joséphine goes on to explain to the audience how they've been having conversations with young people and young adults like them from all over the country about some of the tricky stuff that's going on in the world today...and how it's affecting them but also about the good stuff like 'meditation...Mario Kart... Fanta Grape'. She gets the audience pumped and ready to start the show - but before they begin, the rest of the High Times and Dirty Monsters squad are introduced.

All the characters introduce themselves to the audience. They also describe themselves and what they're wearing.

Maisy is last, and she also describes the layout of the stage, explaining that the stage is full of stuff they're going to be using to tell the stories.

Billy explains how one of the screens has all the words they'll be saying on it. A bit like Netflix but way cooler!

Joséphine rounds up the introductions by asking Grace to open the space with some big sound. They warn the audience that it's going to be loud.

SCENE 3

Grace and Chandu enter the spotlight. Grace does a big beatboxing solo incorporating the words 'High Times and Dirty Monsters'. The sound is loud and can be felt with the bass of the subwoofers, whilst Chandu interprets the sound visually.

The actor's are now in character and Katy introduces Connor to the stage, asking the audience to clap to introduce him.

Connors intro music plays and the words 'Connors story' appear on the captioning screen. The lights change.

SCENE 4

Connor relays the story to the audience of him getting the 86 bus with Gary Barlow on his lap, his dearly departed nan's dog who is named after Gary Barlow because she was such a big fan. He

explains that he was feeling guilty on the bus because he'd lied to his friend about why he couldn't make the big football match going on today, but he couldn't tell the truth because his mate and the other lads would rip him if they found out where he was really going.

Connor explains how he was going to an area of town he didn't really know that well, and how his anxiety stopped him from asking someone for directions despite his eyesight not being the best. However, as he and Gary Barlow wander further down the road, they see a big arrow pointing them in the right direction on the wall. But instead of feeling relief, his heart begins to pound. We hear a heartbeat sound.

Connor doesn't let us know where he is, but he tells us about how he and Gary Barlow walk towards the building, how there's already a queue of people waiting outside and it doesn't open for 10 more minutes. We understand that Connor feels uncomfortable about anyone seeing him, so he waits behind the Chicken Cottage until the doors open. Connor tells us that it would be really embarrassing for him and Gary to be seen in the queue, as Gary is TikTok famous. The last thing they want is someone taking a pic of them and posting it online.

Connor explains to the audience how he and Gary haven't always had the best relationship, and how he thinks his nan left Gary to him in her will as one of the practical jokes they used to play on each other. His nan knew how much he hated Gary 'because he'd run over and start humping his leg 200-thrusts-a-minute with his nasty lipstick dick poking out', so Connor knew the first thing he had to do was take him down the vets to get 'the snip'.

Connor describes how he and Gary became close during lockdown - making them all laugh as they dressed him up in cosplay despite both Connor and his mum losing their jobs and receiving no financial support.

Connor explains to the audience that the reason he's here is because a neighbour stopped him as he was taking Gary for a walk. The neighbour makes a comment and a joke about the dog looking under-fed and then threatens to call the RSPCA if Connor doesn't do something about it.

Connor confesses that when he got to work that day (Subway), he sobbed in the stock room because deep down he knew his neighbour was right, and that he probably should put Gary in a dog's home where they can look after him properly. He explains that because of price increases, he hadn't been able to buy as much dog food as before and so was giving Gary smaller portions.

He describes how he doesn't want people feeling sorry for him - he gets that a lot because he's visually impaired. His manager at Subway ended up finding him in the stock room and told him about a food bank someone she knows used for their own pets. She gives Connor the leaflet. Connor thanks her, tells us that he wasn't going to go - that he was worried about being perceived as a 'charity case'. His manager describes to him how she knows lots of people who have used the foodbank.

However, as he and Gary snuggled up that night, Connor could feel Gary's little ribs digging into him and that's when he decided they had to go.

And here they are...

They go into the foodbank. Connor describes what the foodbank looks like, and how 'all sorts of people' were using it. Though, he can't see any other dogs.

Connor was sure he'd gone to the wrong place when he opened the door and saw tables of human food. As he turns to leave, an older lady, Mags, introduces herself and asks if Connor needs any help. Connor explains he thought this was a food bank for pets. Mags takes him to the back room where the dog food is.

Connor describes all the dog food they have. Connor can feel the thump of Gary's little tail wagging against his leg. He picks up a few bags and has to fill out some paperwork, but Connor just wants to get out of there before they're spotted. As he's about to leave, Mags asks him if there's anything he wants for himself and anyone else at home?

There's loads of jars of peanut butter on the table next to them, and his sister, Mel, loves peanut butter. So he asks to take a jar just for her. They leave the foodbank having not been spotted by anyone they know.

He talks about how this experience makes him realise that it's not his fault he needs the support of a food bank for his family. He returns to the foodbank and asks Mags to show him around so he can pick up a few more bits for his family.

We move to the next part of the story - when Connor gets home. He shows his mum what he's picked up from the foodbank and explains that he only went there for Gary at first, and saw some extra bits that he picked up for them. His sister Mel becomes worried what people will think. Their mum reminds them that there's nothing wrong with asking for help when you need it. Mel's face lights up the room when he pulls out the peanut butter.

Connor heads out to meet his friends and decides he's going to tell them where he really was. He ends his story by stating: 'I am a foodbank user! And I am not ashamed... and neither is Gary!'

There is a change in the lights and the audience clap as we end the scene.

SCENE 5

Katy asks the audience to give a round of applause for Connor's story and asks which of the actors want to tell their character's story next.

Joséphine volunteers to go next and explains that she'll be doing Sasha's story. Jayden asks Joséphine what she'll need to tell Sasha's story and they set up the space with what she asks for. The music plays and the words 'Sasha's story' appear on the captioning screen.

SCENE 6

Sasha sits on the sofa and tells us how excited she is for the party that is happening tomorrow night. She also tells us that the party's going to be particularly epic because they didn't get to have a party for their 18th birthdays due to Lockdown.

Sasha explains that the only downside of the party is that she's going to have to give up her place on the sofa for a couple of nights because it'll be needed for one of Lauren's cousin's that is coming for the party. She tells us how when Lauren's mum asked her about giving up the sofa she

told her that was fine and expressed how grateful she is for them letting her crash at their house for so long.

She retells how her relationship with Lauren has been strained since she's been staying on the sofa at Lauren's house. Lauren and her mum are out, and so Sasha is cleaning the house. She's alone in the house but hates when the house is empty and can't stand the quiet.

We hear the sound of a message alert come through: Sasha exclaims 'Maya!'. In the message Maya tells Sasha that she won't be able to offer her a place to stay tonight unfortunately as she and her partner Jamal are having a tricky time.

Sasha explains to us that over the last few months she's been crashing at her mates houses - and even her Nan's care home at one point.

Although she feels they're life savers, there have been awkward moments while she's been staying with them like when Josie, Lauren's mum, brought home a boyfriend and she could hear them having sex upstairs. She describes how even with encounters like this, she loves staying here. It's got hot showers, good food and the pink, fluffy sofa; it's the first place that's felt like home for her in years.

She explains how Lauren was really there for her when Sasha got her autism diagnosis and again when she was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. She goes on to explain how she loves Lauren's dry personality and how Lauren's got ADHD and describes their 'disorders' as superpowers.

Sasha goes on to talk about how Lauren, out of the blue, asked her when she'd be going back home last night. Lauren wouldn't drop it, saying that her mum might want Sasha to leave soon - and asking Sasha what her long-term plan was; like maybe staying in a hostel.

Sasha reminisces about when as young girl she'd draw her dream house in school. She reveals how she feels that even back then at the age of 6 she knew this would just be a wish because where she grew up everyone lived in terraces and tower blocks, not detached houses. She goes on to describe what her dream house would look like if she had to draw one now and how it would be surrounded by loads of animals and lions to scare away the monsters.

Big party music plays.

Sasha relays to us how it was the night of the party and everything was going well, things were feeling like they used to between her and Lauren. However, later on in the garden, things got a little messy when someone dared her to sit on the baby's swing and she ended up breaking it.

Sasha relays the argument between herself and Lauren. Lauren was shouting at her about how things cost money and ended up blurting out that she just wants Sasha to go. Sasha explains to us how she tried to compromise with Lauren; telling her that she'll get out of her hair by going to the cinema all day tomorrow so she'll be out of the house, but Lauren felt she wasn't

understanding her. The scene ends with Sasha acting out how Lauren let out her true emotions as she questioned Sasha on why she's so scared to be by herself.

Sasha leaves the house party and runs to the park. She poetically explains how she felt small under the tall trees and angrily questions the universe asking what it's got planned for her now. She calms herself down by singing her and Lauren's comfort song: 'Cauliflowers fluffy and cabbages green'.

Sasha calms down, telling us that Lauren is right and that she doesn't know why she's so scared of being with her thoughts. She explains how it feels like there's a beast sitting in her chest when it's quiet and she's alone.

She picks up her phone and calls a number. We listen as she talks into the phone, explaining that she needs somewhere to stay. We do not know who she is talking to.

Sasha tells us about going to the hostel that night. She explains how she's given a tour by one of the workers, who shows her to her new room on a floor with just women and girls.

Music plays and the lights change.

Sasha excitedly daydreams about how it's her 21st birthday in two weeks time and how Lauren and Josie will take her out, and how she'll invite her new friend Dominique - from the hostel. She talks about how for the first time in a long time she'll know that she is truly loved - not because of the presents but because of the presence of those around her. And how she'll go back to the hostel with Dominique and go to sleep in her room, dreaming about her dream home. The lights change.

SCENE 7

Maisy talks to the audience asking how everyone's doing. Chandu talks to the cast, suggesting that they do something silly before the next story.

Billy steps up proclaiming that his moment has come. He grabs some modelling balloons. He tells the audience to shout out anything in the world and he'll make it.

The audience shout out random suggestions - Billy accepts as suggestion asks Grace to give us some beats. Billy and Grace work together as Billy makes...a dog. He presents his balloon figure creation to us, the audience, explaining that this is his interpretation of the suggestion.

Jayden lets the cast know that he's ready to tell his character's story.

SCENE 8

Jamal uses Dance, movement, Visual Vernacular (VV) and British Sign Language (BSL) to describe to us how today is a bad day and how he's feeling blue and stuck but he reassures us that he doesn't always feel this way. The following story is told through movement and is spoken too.

Jamal's words rhyme in a form of poetry as he tells us how on a good day the world dances to the beat of his tune. Jamal dances and his feet make the beat. He talks about how music and dance are a way for him to escape life's stresses and strains. Throughout this, we hear music and beat and bass are established.

Jamal describes the different ways in which his body moves and flows. He describes the boldness of his mind and his determination.

He tells us about his relationship with his girlfriend Maya.

He walks us through him and his daughter, Angel, signing Goodbye to each other as he drops her off at nursery.

He goes on to explain to us how his mind goes on holiday on a good day and how his inner beatbox takes over.

Jamal describes how on a good day, he rises above the issues he has with his family, stemming from the doctors telling them not to sign to him when he was younger. He explains how this caused difficulties in their communication and connection but he knows they love him though.

He tells us about his goal of becoming an architect and how he wants to make houses for people that look like him. He lets us know that he is 'Black, Deaf, Loud and Proud.'

Jamal explains that no matter how much ambition and creative thirst he has, he's always going to put his family (Maya and Angel) first.

The music transforms and shifts into a hard bassline with grimey vibes. The phrase 'on a good day' is repeated several times.

The music changes. Jamal describes to the audience how today is a bad day though. He tells us how he feels trapped in his head and his body is heavy. He talks about how he ends up rolling 'zoots' (weed) and how sometimes he feels like he can't take anymore because his monsters come out on a bad day.

A monster appears in the space - played by Joséphine.

He describes how when his monsters come out he feels like he can't breathe and is overwhelmed by his worries about the world that his child is going to have to grow up in.

Big grimey, bass is heard and felt through the subwoofers. Jamal grabs the mic and performs the 'fuck' poem. Each line starts with the word 'fuck' and expresses all the things are negatively affecting Jamal's mental wellbeing. The explosion of emotion ends with him letting out how he feels he is not a good enough dad.

The music stops and Jamal lies down on a heap on the floor.

Jamal's girlfriend, Maya enters the space. Maya reminds Jamal that Angel is waiting for him to tell her a bedtime story as she's got to go to work. Maya can tell something is wrong with Jamal but he just keeps telling her that nothing's wrong. Maya pleads with him not to shut her out so she can help him. We see the Monster inside Jamal come out expressing how he doesn't need her help and wants her to leave him alone. Maya doesn't hear this however as it's what Jamal is thinking and feeling. She asks if she needs to phone in sick but Jamal tells her he's fine and she should go to work. She says goodnight to their daughter Angel and leaves.

We hear the door slam. Jamal expresses to us how the monster feels like a heavy load on his back and how he can't show it to Maya because he fears she'll leave him because of it.

He describes how he enters the bedroom and Angel must be able to sense the presence of his monster as she takes his hand, squeezes it and makes him feel better. He reads the book using poetry to create fun imagery of characters like Big dogs and Angry frogs. We can feel how his mood has been lifted. He describes how he can feel the monster slowly sliding off his back. We see him texting Maya to tell her he's sorry and that he loves her. The lights change.

SCENE 9

Billy check in with the audience. He introduces the last story, Katy's story; asking Maisy what she needs.

Music plays and we see the words 'Katy's Story' on the screen.

SCENE 10

Katy has excited energy as she tells us how she can't believe she's here and has been invited to something like this. We don't quite know where she is but she describes how everyone's arriving now: her lecturers, the donors and all the so-called VIPs.

She has a strong scouse accent and tells us how when she met some of the other winners (who are a bit posh) they gushed over her because of her accent.

Katy tells us that she's dreading doing her speech but at least they're getting free food, as she's only had snacks so far today and is really hungry - University student life!

Katy gets a text and reads it aloud - it's from her mum - letting her know that she is running late ...as per usual. Katy relays to us how her and her mum had a bit of an argument this morning because she asked her not to take pictures at the event today. She tells us how it's a running argument between them because her mum puts pictures up of her on facebook for every event and any milestone. Katy explains how she asked her mum 'not to make a show tonight' because she usually always creates some kind of drama and she doesn't want that happening at tonight's event.

A scene is played out in which Katy narrates how Louisa, the event manager, introduces her to a major donor called Peter Carmichael, who will be presenting her with the award. She describes his appearance, likening him to Dumbledore and how he placed his hand on her shoulder and how she hates being touched by strangers. She tells us about what it was like to meet his wife and how her tutor, Colin, is already drunk but she's saving getting drunk until after her speech.

Her Mum texts - letting her know that she's stuck in work so won't make it for the meal part of the night but will definitely be there to see her receive her award. She replies to her mum letting her know that she can watch it from home if it's too difficult to get there but she doesn't receive a reply.

She explains how she's sat on a table with Colin, his wife and three other old white men, one of whom is Mr Henderson. Mr Henderson is part of the law firm that she wants to get a post grad intern job at. Katy describes how the food and conversation are very different from what she enjoys and is used to but how she nods along, smiles and reminds herself to play the game.

She explains how she felt bad after noticing her mum's place name holder on the table and the empty seat next to her so messaged her mum again but received no answer.

The main course arrives. The conversation turns towards Peter's oil company and we can sense an air of controversy in the room when Katy states that she does believe in the cause of the 'Just Stop Oil' protesters.

The table is served their dessert - Katy recognises a tattoo that the waiter has - it's Jacko, a person that was on her course in 1st year. She tells us how Jacko ended up dropping out of university because of money issues and took himself off all social media.

They start to talk but their conversation is interrupted by Peter demanding Jacko pour him more wine. Katy describes to us how she feels shocked and disgusted at this but also feels really guilty about the fact that Jacko had to drop out of Uni due to lack of finances while she is sitting there at the table with all these rich people. She looks around the room and notices other imbalances.

Her mum, Stella, arrives. She introduces herself to the people around the table. She's not impressed with the menu that Jacko brings over and asks for chips instead. The people around the table find her funny and are laughing but Katy is fuming as she poses for a picture with them, which her mum wants to post on facebook.

Katy describes how her mum was telling Peter that he needs to reduce fuel prices because she's a cab driver. She retells how everyone at the table is laughing even more but she can't take the embarrassment anymore and whispers in her mum's ear for her to stop, as everyone is laughing at her, not with her. She describes how the table quietened and that she wasn't sure if it was because the other people at the table had heard her or not.

Peter tries to carry on the conversation with Katy's mum but it is obvious that Stella has been affected by Katy's comments and has shut down in a way that Katy hasn't seen her do before. Stella picks up her bag and asks to be excused from the table to get some fresh air.

Jacko insinuates to Katy that she should go after her mum but she describes how she just couldn't move. Then Louisa came over to let her know that it was nearly time for her to go up on stage to receive her award, do her speech and take some pictures. Louisa asks Katy whether she'll be using her wheelchair or stick for the photographs and seems happy when Katy says she'll probably use the wheelchair.

Grace does a live voice over welcoming us to the award ceremony and welcomes Peter to the stage to present the award. Katy describes what it's like as she's wheeled onto the stage. She looks out into the audience for her mum but can't see her. She tells how she's feeling and how she wishes she was at home. Peter presents her with The 2023 Inspiration Award and describes Katy

as someone who hasn't let being from an economically disadvantaged background and being disabled hold her back.

Katy gets handed a mic to say a few words. During her speech Katy's feelings come out and she tells the audience that she can't accept the award. She expresses how it doesn't sit right with her that she should receive an award for being 'economically disadvantaged' when the university is failing its economically disadvantaged students. Although Peter tries to encourage her to leave the stage, Katy carries on calling the university out, especially for tokenizing disabled students and presenting them with certain awards. She asks for the university to be better at supporting students and asks the audience if there's anyone else who can relate. She goes on to express how she's more than her disability and lists different aspects of her personality as well as her interests and hobbies. She ends her speech by doing a mic drop.

SCENE 11

Joséphine asks the audience to give a round of applause to Maisy for telling Katy's story. She lets the audience know that they're nearly at the end of the show and informs the audience of information in the foyer. Joséphine tells us they want to give us an insight into some of the good things that came up in conversations they had. The beat builds and the cast together to recite a poem about the good things.

Jayden invites the audience to move with them as they drop a beat and end the night with a banger.

SCENE 12

Grace drops a beat. The cast invites the audience to join in with the hook and 'BIG UP THE ENERGY!'. The music is loud, the lights are bright and we end with a big party as the audience are invited to join in the party from their seats.

Signposting

It is really important that you take the time to think about the wellbeing of the young people you are working with - before, during and after the performance - particularly for those who will connect with the lived experience of the characters in the play. You can find a full synopsis of the show on page 10 of this toolkit, we would suggest that you read through this and talk through anything that may be triggering, upsetting or uncomfortable for anyone in the space. If you'd like some more information or support from us on this, please contact Roxy: Roxy@20storieshigh.org.uk.

Signposting

Guide Dogs UK

For:

- Advice and support for people with sight loss.
- Referrals for training on: Cane skills, guide dogs, technology, life skills.
- Applying for a service of support.
- Living independently with sight loss.

www.guidedogs.org.uk

0800 781 144

VICTA

For:

- Support specifically for blind children and young adults.
- Grant applications and awards for the purchase of equipment which helps with your visual impairment.
- Information about social events and activities that are suitable for blind people.
- Support with employability, social and living skills.

www.victa.org.uk

01908 240 831

Scope

For:

- Practical information around living with disabilities
- Emotional support
- Information around campaigns Scope run for a fairer society

www.scope.org.uk

0808 800 3333

ADHD Babes

For:

- Support for Black Women and Non-binary people of African-Caribbean descent with ADHD.
- Information on ADHD and diagnostic routes.
- Advice on applying for the 'right to care' scheme.
- Peer support groups and networks.

www.adhdbabes.com

ADHD UK

For:

- Information on ADHD and diagnostic routes.
- Pathway to diagnosis information
- Peer support groups and networks.

www.adhduk.co.uk

Borderline Support UK

For:

- Peer support groups
- Information on your local service for BPD support

www.borderlinesupport.org.uk

Mind – Mental Health support

For:

- Information about diagnosis and support for things such as anger, anxiety, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, depression, eating problems, loneliness, obsessive compulsive disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, self harm, stress and addiction.

www.mind.org.uk (visit information and support, types of mental health problems)

0300 123 3393

Royal National Institute for Deaf people (RNID)

For:

- Information on hearing loss, tinnitus, ear health, technology and assistive devices
- Support with claiming disability benefits and discounts
- Information on your rights at work and with public services
- Communication support
- Finding local support services near you

www.rnid.org.uk

Citizens Advice – Food Bank support

For:

- Referrals to your local food bank provider
- Information on where you can access community food banks & pantries outside of referrals

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

0800 144 8848

Shelter

For:

- Support with homelessness – if you are homeless now or worried you could be in the next two months
- Support with applications to local councils to get emergency housing
- Support with being asked to leave a friend's house and overcrowding

www.shelter.org.uk

0808 800 4444 (emergency helpline)

Samaritans

For:

- A listening ear, to support your general mental health and wellbeing, any time of the day
116 123

www.samaritans.org

The Mix

For:

- Help and advice on a wide range of issues for under 25s
0808 808 4994

www.themix.org.uk

Join Us Online

We are keen to connect digitally with our audiences, partners and participants. There are a whole host of ways venues and individual audience members can connect with us artistically and also engage in conversations about the show.

#HighTimesAndDirtyMonsters

Credits

Special thanks to the Co-producers and all the touring venues.

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