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## **'The Headcount' A survey on the gender breakdown of eight Arts Council of Northern Ireland core-funded theatre companies 2014-2019**

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# WAKING



# THE



# FEMINISTS



# NI

***'The Headcount'* A survey on the gender  
breakdown of eight Arts Council of  
Northern Ireland core-funded theatre  
companies 2014-2019**

**Written by Maggie Cronin.**

**Research team: Maggie Cronin, Vittoria Cafolla, Caoileann Curry-Thompson,**

**Liz Cullinane, Louise Parker.**



Between August 2017 and March 2019, the research group of Waking the Feminists Northern Ireland (WTFNI) undertook a survey of the gender breakdown within eight Arts Council of Northern Ireland core funded theatre companies. Our aim was to collect data on the number of female theatre practitioners working and the types of roles they had within these companies. The time period surveyed was from 2014-2019. In embarking upon this survey and analysis of data, we took our lead from the methodology employed in *Gender Counts*, researched by Dr Brenda Donohue, Dr Ciara O’Dowd, Dr Tanya Dean, Ciara Murphy, Kathleen Cawley and Kate Harris and commissioned by Waking the Feminists (#WTF). With a few adaptations, we have relied on this template in compiling and analysing these statistics.<sup>i</sup> Some direct comparisons will inevitably be drawn between the original WTF survey and the one we present now. It is worth bearing in mind that, aside from some differences of methodology, (and in the range and scope of roles surveyed), the time periods examined are of different lengths, and their start and end dates do not align completely.<sup>ii</sup> Recently, however, WTF have produced new data up to 2019 in *5 Years On: Gender in Irish Theatre - An Interim View*,<sup>iii</sup> so there is some overlap between the two time periods surveyed. Our hope is that WTFNI’s findings will provide much - needed data into gender equality within Northern Ireland’s theatre sector. In doing so, we also hope to forge new initiatives to promote gender parity within the performing arts across the island of Ireland and beyond.

*An early version of the findings of this survey was presented by Maggie Cronin on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020 at The Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast.*<sup>iv</sup>

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## Background to the Headcount

### **Waking the Feminists, Gender Counts ... and beyond. A brief “herstory”.**

Before discussing our findings in detail, I would like to give a little bit of background on the formation of *Waking the Feminists* (#WTF) and in turn, *Waking the Feminists Northern Ireland* (WTFNI). Although much has already been written about #WTF’s rapid spread and far reaching impact on Irish theatre, the events bear re-telling in order to contextualise our own story and our aims and objectives moving forward from this survey. In November 2015, The Abbey Theatre Dublin, launched its forthcoming season commemorating the centenary of the Easter Rising of 1916. Entitled ‘Waking the Nation’, the Abbey programme featured just one female writer,<sup>v</sup> and ‘few female creatives’<sup>vi</sup> for the ten listed productions announced at the press launch in November 2015. What had been envisaged as a nuanced retrospective, ‘interrogating rather than celebrating the past’,<sup>vii</sup> instead became emblematic of the chronic underrepresentation and marginalisation of women working within Ireland’s theatre sector.<sup>viii</sup> The response, initiated via social media by theatre designer Lian Bell, was rapid and furious. It went viral globally, sustained by celebrity endorsement and by print and broadcast media, galvanising #Waking the Feminists into being. Within weeks, a public meeting had been called at the Abbey (12th November 2015), and the decision taken to investigate the link between publicly funded theatre and gender imbalance in the Republic of Ireland. The collection of data on the gender breakdown of seven key creative roles in the top ten Arts Council Ireland funded theatre companies began. This was completed just over a year later and the report *Gender Counts*,<sup>ix</sup> was published in 2016. By 9th July 2018, the gender equality policies of ten theatre institutions in the Republic of Ireland were launched.<sup>x</sup> Since then, a follow up report has been produced,<sup>xi</sup> collecting and analysing self-reported figures from participating theatres guided by the methodology initiated by the original report team.

One cannot underestimate the impact of *Gender Counts* and the effect it had on promoting gender equality in theatres in the Republic of Ireland – or the inspiration it gave. Many theatre practitioners from the North had become involved in the original #WTF events – attending The Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in November 2015, and contributed to the personal testimonies on the website. Nollaig na mBan events also proved popular across Ireland, including two hosted by the renowned performance artist Amanda Coogan at her studio in Belfast. There was an appetite for change from individuals working within the theatre sector in Northern Ireland. The response, however, to the findings of *Waking the Feminists* at company or funding agency level was more muted and lacked cohesion.<sup>xii</sup> This does not automatically imply indifference, and there were many individual creative and administrative representatives of theatre companies who were also anxious to seize the moment and examine their ways of working in order to initiate change.<sup>xiii</sup> It has to be said, that in comparison to the original campaign of WTF, our research work in the North has been conducted at a much slower pace.

There are, perhaps, other factors to consider. It is possible to argue that the different historical and current socio-political contexts in which theatre is made in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland also had a bearing on the reaction, or lack of it.<sup>xiv</sup> Historically, our legacy is one of contested identity; many of the struggles for “parity of esteem” have focused on the division between two communities: Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR). Not entirely unconnected to that is the historic lack of an executive-led policy and political ambivalence towards the arts.<sup>xv</sup> The arts sector, has always been chronically underfunded and this has created a “firefighting” environment ultimately resulting in little time or appetite to address wider inequalities within the theatre sector. Recently published figures show that:

‘Northern Ireland has the lowest levels of per capita government spending on the Arts, and the disparity of funding continues to grow. Based on 2020/21 budget, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland receives only £5.38 per capita contrasting sharply with Wales at £10.41 and the Republic of Ireland £28.52’<sup>xvi</sup>

This severely limits the space in which nuanced discussion needs to take place, particularly around the sensitive areas of representation and marginalisation., but there is also, of course, the wider patriarchal and hierarchical context in which theatre universally operates. This is not something that can be looked at in only terms of individual theatres or people. The patterns of gender and other inequalities have to be seen as global and systemic; they have been “hiding in plain sight” for millennia. Given the vacuum of information, there was an urgent need for quantitative data, not only to give a clear picture on the gender breakdown within our own publicly funded theatres, but to see where information and data aligned with other findings elsewhere.

### **Waking the Feminists Northern Ireland**

In June 2016, Northern Irish based theatre practitioners Jo Egan and Finn Kennedy hosted a meeting at The Barracks performance space and out of this WTFNI was born. From its formation, two distinct strands of activism began to emerge; the first was to address the issue of sexual abuse, bullying and harassment in Northern Ireland’s Performing Arts industry, through the creation of a “safe space”. The second remit was the collection of data in relation to gender representation from a number of publicly funded theatre companies. Whilst this report deals solely with latter remit and the findings of the research committee, it is important to note that the creation of a “safe space” allowed people to come forward and to talk in confidence about their experiences of abuse, bullying and harassment. This made a

significant contribution to the Department of the Economy's decision to close down a theatrical agency in Belfast and to ban the agent running it, for ten years.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **The WTFNI Research team**

Our research team was formed in December 2016. Originally the research group consisted of Vittoria Cafolla, Maggie Cronin, Liz Cullinane, and Caoileann Curry-Thompson (resigned 2019). A few months later, in 2017, we were joined by Louise Parker. The research group was entirely comprised of freelancers who work within the Northern Irish Theatre sector – we are, variously, writers, actors, artists, designers and directors. As freelancers, we had all worked, at different times, with many of the companies we surveyed and our combined knowledge was wide-ranging.

### **The Headcount survey:**

Our aims in collecting this data were in alignment with the aims recorded by the researchers and authors of *Gender Counts*:

- ‘To measure female representation in Irish theatre, providing information that can form the basis for evidence-based solutions to the underrepresentation of women in the sector’.<sup>xviii</sup>
- ‘To investigate how public funding relates to female representation in the selected organisations’.

- With some adaptations, our methodology corresponds with the methodology developed in the original survey carried out on behalf of Waking the Feminists and subsequently published in *Gender Counts*.

In August 2017, we began a pilot study of The Lyric Theatre and we were assisted by Queen's University Belfast MA student, Yangzi 'Sunny' Qin who spent her work placement with us. Like every other group formed within Waking the Feminists Northern Ireland, we gave our time and knowledge voluntarily. We do, however, gratefully acknowledge the grant of £500 from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland which enabled us to pay social sciences PhD candidate Gemma Cherry who worked tirelessly to help analyse and present the figures and help maintain objectivity throughout the process.



**Other thanks:** We would like to thank Dr Tanya Dean, Dr Deborah Dean, Dr Victoria Durrer, Dr Aoife McGrath and Dr Trish McTigue who provided advice and support as we began this journey and Dr Dirk Schubotz for his advice and for introducing Dr Gemma Cherry to us. We would also like to thank the theatre companies we visited and who made their data available to us over the research period. Thanks also to Niamh Flanagan, (Executive Director, Theatre and Dance NI); Dr Caoileann Curry – Thompson, (Acting Head of Drama and Arts Officer, ACNI) and to the research group for their invaluable proof reading, correcting, additional information and support.

## Headcount Headlines:

### **A brief summary of findings and some points to remember.**

#### **Directors**

- Overall, women make up **63.77%** of the total Directors in Northern Ireland's core funded theatres.<sup>xix</sup> This is accounted for by a high level of female artistic directors who occupy that role in five of the eight theatres surveyed. Of the remaining three, two are run by male artistic directors; each artistic director tends to be responsible for all of their respective companies directorial duties. When reading graphs and tables this will frequently account for an 100% female or male representation within this category.<sup>xx</sup> The Lyric theatre is the exception within this group as it currently has an executive producer (male) responsible for directing some productions along with number of guest directors.
- **Overall percentage for female artistic directors** **63.77%**

#### **Writers**

- Despite a high representation of female artistic directors across the survey group, this has not automatically resulted in a raised representation of female theatre practitioners across all other roles, including that of writer.
- **Overall Percentage for female writers** **36.78%**

## Headcount Headlines cont'd

### Cast

- Overall figures for cast suggest a figure approaching parity between female and male representation: What cannot be ascertained from these figures are the size and/or status of roles or indeed the age ranges of those playing them.
- **Overall percentage for female cast: 46.83%**

### Design

- The survey found that more male designers tend to double up design roles on a production, most frequently for set and lighting design (they were counted separately for each distinct role). On occasion, it was for set and costume design. Whilst there are also examples of female designers doubling roles (most often in set and costume design), it is less frequent. They are more likely to take on one design role than two and the largest female representation is in the role of costume designer.

### Set Designer

- Female theatre practitioners are under-represented overall in set design roles, but three individual theatre companies report an overrepresentation.
- **Overall percentage female set designer: 40.51%**

## Headcount Headlines cont'd

### **Lighting Designer**

- The overall underrepresentation of female lighting designers is more marked and is consistent throughout all of the companies surveyed.
- **Overall percentage female lighting designers: 21.65%**

### **Sound Design**

- By far the lowest female representation, however, is in the sound category.
- **Overall percentage female sound designer: 12.41%**

### **Costume Design**

- By contrast, costume design, is the one category where women are significantly over represented.
- **Overall percentage female costume designer: 77.88%**

## **Headcount Headlines cont'd**

### **Production: Stage Manager**

In this report, we kept our methodology aligned to the original Waking the Feminists template, concentrating on the key creative roles as defined in their report.<sup>xxi</sup> There is one exception however where we have provided the data for Stage Management.<sup>xxii</sup> We would have liked to have included Technical roles but the collection of this data was more problematic. There are a number of headings that are used to define the role of technician and technical manager across different companies and the remit of these roles within each company differed slightly. It was decided therefore, that an accurate analysis of these figures could not be produced at this time. It is hoped that future surveys could include more production roles, perhaps after further consultation with theatre companies over the definitions and agreed parameters of each surveyed occupation. For the category of Stage Manager we have taken an aggregate of a number of sub divisions of roles, thus Company Stage Manager, Deputy Stage Manager, Assistant Stage Manager were counted up together.

**Overall percentage female Stage Manager:**

**81.064%**

## **Methodology**

**With some exceptions, we have followed the original template established within the *Gender Counts (2017)* by Dr. Brenda Donohue, Dr. Ciara O’Dowd, Dr. Tanya Dean, Ciara Murphy, Kathleen Cawley, and Kate Harris. We have highlighted any differences to the original methodology throughout this report.**

Our task was to investigate the gender balance within a selection of publicly funded theatre companies, specifically focussing on the representation of women within certain defined roles within these companies. We also wanted to examine the link between gender balance and the level of public funding at each company. We collected data on what were termed “non-transferable roles”, in other words, only roles directly linked to the creation and presentation of theatre productions as listed above. To this end, we investigated the gender breakdown within eight Arts Council of Northern Ireland core funded theatre companies and we collected data on professional theatre practitioners (defined as employed on an Equity or equivalent industry standard contract for the duration of a production). These roles included:

- Director
- Author
- Cast
- Set Designer
- Lighting (LX) Designer
- Sound (FX) Designer
- Costume Designer
- We have also included Stage Management

## **Methodology cont'd**

### **The Companies Surveyed**

- We visited and gathered data from eight theatre producing companies who are recipients of ACNI Annual Funding Programme awards. The eight core companies surveyed were:

### **Aisling Ghear, Big Telly, Cahoots, Kabosh, The Lyric, Prime Cut, Replay & Tinderbox.**

- Core funded companies receive Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) funding on an annual basis. This enables companies to plan ahead, programme and commission future work unlike project funded companies, who, as the name suggests, are funded on a project-by-project basis. This is the common thread between the selected companies who at first glance, might appear to have little in common. They vary in size and scale, the number of shows produced, and in how and where they present theatre productions, depending on the size, scope and target audience for each show. Out of this selection, only the Lyric Theatre has a purpose-built venue base.

### **Some exclusions: Festivals and the MAC.**

- The Arts Council of Northern Ireland also grants Annual Funding to a number of Festivals, and many of them have a performing arts component. None, however, are exclusively theatre festivals.<sup>xxiii</sup> This was a factor, alongside consideration of our limited resources, in excluding them from the survey.

## **Methodology cont'd**

- The MAC Arts Centre, Belfast, has a theatre auditorium and studio space. It is not, however funded as a producing house, and comes within ACNI's venues portfolio. It is viewed as being predominantly a "receiving house", therefore not eligible to be included within the remit of the survey.<sup>xxiv</sup>
- During the time of our survey, one of the eligible companies, Bruiser, lost its Annual Funding Programme status entirely. It now receives Annual Lottery Project Funding and therefore was not included in our final survey.

### **What sources of funding did we count?**

- Most companies have other sources of income in addition to Annual funding; for example, other Arts Council funding, income from foundations, charities and local city or district council funding. This may affect their total income and place them in a different funding order to the one outlined here. For the purposes of this survey we did not include any other sources, apart from the ACNI Annual Funding Programme. (Exchequer and National Lottery combined).<sup>xxv</sup>

*For a more detailed breakdown of the annual funding, detailing Exchequer and Lottery sources, please go to Appendix 1 on p70.*

## Methodology cont'd

### Table showing the eight theatre companies within the Arts Council of Northern Ireland

#### Drama Portfolio in receipt of the Annual Funding Programme (AFP) 2014 - 2019<sup>xxvi</sup>

| <b>Company Name</b>                   | Five-year total of ACNI Annual Funding Programme Awards per company within the survey.<br><b>Amounts in millions &amp; thousands.</b> | % of total funds allocated per company within the survey. | Average award for each company within the survey per annum during 2014 - 2019 |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| The Lyric                             | £ 4,946,789.00  | 54.048%   | £989,357.8  |
| Prime Cut                             | £760,255.00   | 8.306%  | £152,051.00   |
| Big Telly                             | £736,346.00   | 8.045%  | £147,269.00   |
| Replay                                | £727,770.00   | 7.951%  | £145,554.00   |
| Tinderbox                             | £674,819.00   | 7.099%  | £134,963.80   |
| Cahoots                               | £596,544.00   | 6.51%   | £119,308.80   |
| Aisling Ghear                         | £369,415.00   | 4.036%  | £73,883.00  |
| Kabosh                                | £340,583.00   | 3.72%   | £68,116.60  |
| <b>5-year total for all companies</b> | <b>£9,156,199.00</b>  | <b>100.0%</b>   | <b>Total average p/a £1,830,502.4*</b>  |

- The source of information on the funding figures comes from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; specifically a pdf sheet recording the ACNI's funding from 2010 - 2020, which is accessible from the ACNI website. <sup>xxvii</sup>
- Only Exchequer (for core costs; overheads, staff wages) and National Lottery funding (for programming) were included. All other ACNI awards were discounted, as were awards from outside sources such as charitable trusts or Borough and City councils.

## **Methodology cont'd**

- The order of funding is based on the total funding awarded over the five years of 2014/15-2018/19 : during this time all companies have seen a fluctuation in funding awards. In particular, during this period, both Kabosh and Tinderbox sustained major cuts.
- The Lyric theatre receives **54.048%** of the total funding; more than all the other companies combined. Whilst the disparity of funding between the Lyric and other companies is great, it is worth keeping in mind that the Lyric is the only venue-based theatre company within this survey, operating out of a purpose-built building attracting far greater overheads and staff costs.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## **Time period surveyed**

- Whereas the original *Gender Counts* report focused on a ten-year period from 2006-2015, constraints on our time and resources necessitated that the time span we surveyed was shorter. The time span that we surveyed was the five-year period from March 2014 - March 2019.

## **Methodology cont'd**

**What did we include in the survey?**

**We are aware that “main stage” productions are realised in differing ways by each company, but the following criteria was applicable to all the productions surveyed:**

- Literary theatre – pre-scripted, pre-rehearsed, word-based performances, created from a variety of methods of authorship.
- Theatre productions by professional companies defined as offering Professional Equity or equivalent industry standard contracts of employment. These include performances of children’s theatre / theatre for young people and families.
- Plays of 45 minutes + duration or a programme of component plays making up a thematic whole.
- A run of at least five performances, with tours or ‘re-mounts’ counted separately.
- All languages included.

## Methodology cont'd

### **What was not included?**

- Play readings, development presentations, community plays or showcase events not up to full production.
- Productions identifying explicitly as music, visual art, cabaret, opera, circus, spoken word, dance or any other non-theatre form.
- Within a production: Community casts, supernumeraries, interns or students appearing in a professional production. <sup>xxix</sup>

### **What were we counting and how did we count it?**

- We counted the *frequency of gender representation* in particular roles within core funded theatres in Northern Ireland. In other words, the amount of times a male-identifying or female-identifying person was employed in any of the defined key creative roles within a production. In the case of one person occupying two roles (set & lighting designer and/or costume designer, for example), it is the gender occupying that role, not the person themselves that is being counted. Therefore each role will be counted.

## **Methodology cont'd**

- Tours and remounts of shows are treated as separate productions from the original run as they will generate fresh employment opportunities for cast and crew. (And in some cases have some changes of personnel from the original production).
- Care was taken, in the case of co-productions to avoid duplication of productions and personnel, crediting them only once to one company, not to both. (Thus if company *x* performs a play in theatre *y*, the production will be credited to company *x* alone).

### **How did we credit authorship?**

- Authorship covers many ways of producing a playscript, so we included plays written by a single playwright, shared playwriting credits, and devised work.
- Shared authorship was credited 50% - 50%. This included adaptations, when the author of the source text was credited if the work was in copyright. Then authorship was shared 50% - 50% between source author and adapter. <sup>xxx</sup>
- Devised work: Because devised work featured heavily in some of the theatre companies surveyed, we divided the percentage thus: Lead deviser 50% (This was often the director of the play as well), co-devisers (often actors) make up the remaining 50%.<sup>xxxi</sup>

## **Methodology cont'd**

- Translators and dramaturgs have not been counted in this report – although data was collected from individual companies who had identified these roles in their credits. There is an argument to be made for the future inclusion of these categories within the umbrella of authorship as definitions of “writer/creator” expand and recalibrate.

### **How did we collect the data?**

- We met with each theatre company and gathered information via a number of sources: theatre programmes, archived production information and cast lists – supplied by theatre companies.
- Additional information was gathered or cross checked from reviews in Industry newspapers and magazines (for example, *The Stage*) and websites such as the Irish Theatre Institute’s Irish Playography.
- The information for every production was put into a survey document created by Vittoria Cafolla which linked to a separate excel sheet for each company. From this information, the data was collated and analysed and graphs, tables & charts produced.
- All data was anonymised – only gender is indicated on these forms. At no point were contract details, or the personal, financial details of any artist or theatre practitioner seen by members of the research group.

## **Methodology cont'd**

### **How is the data presented?**

- We present the figures in several ways: Using graphs and tables, we display the percentages of female representation across the total of companies and within individual roles in each company. We also use graphs and tables to make comparison with male percentages across theatre companies and individual roles.

### **A note on gender:**

- We recognise that gender is not a biological imperative or binary in nature. For the purposes of this survey, categorisation has been based on the gender individuals publicly identify as during the time of this survey.<sup>xxxii</sup> To the best of our knowledge nobody in this sample identified as non-binary or transgender and all surveyed were cis gendered for this particular time period..

### **Notes on interpreting the data**

- As the size and purpose of each company varies, not every production will have the full complement of the seven main roles, or the all of the production roles within Stage Management. We are looking at the frequency of female representation in total and within individual companies. A note of caution, some percentages reflect very low figures within a given role in a company.

## **Methodology cont'd**

- With the exception of the Lyric, most of the other theatre productions are directed by the artistic director of each company. This accounts for the 100% male or female representation in most companies. For example, Cahoots has one male artistic director and 100% of the shows directed by him. Big Telly has one female artistic director who has directed 100% of their shows during the time period surveyed.
- Co-produced shows: we made sure to credit only the originating Theatre in order not to duplicate figures.

## Summary of Findings

# WAKING THE FEMINISTS NI

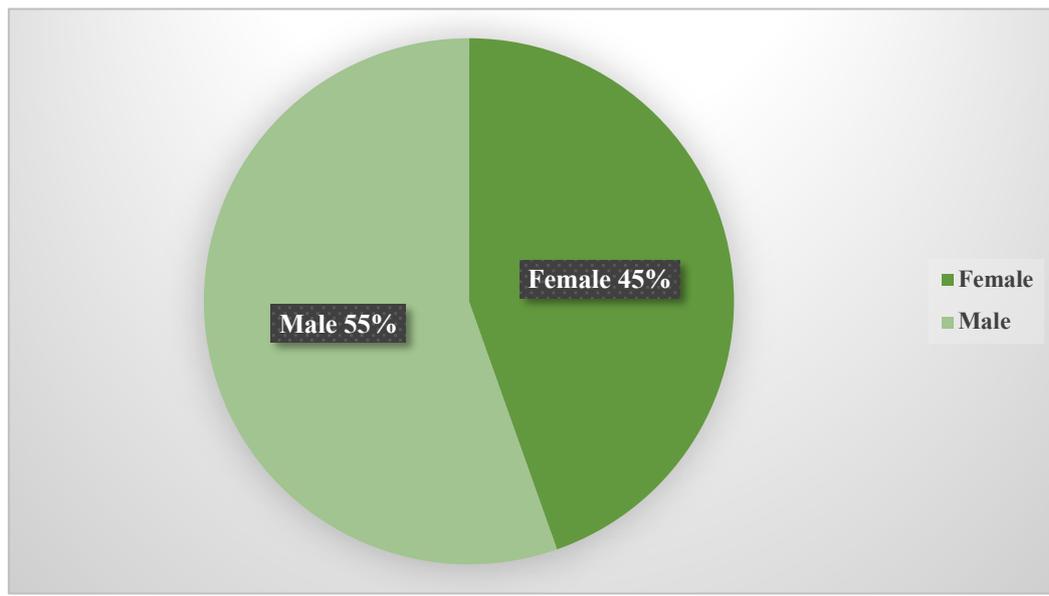
During the time period surveyed, theatre practitioners were employed in the seven key creative roles **1539** times across all the core funded companies .

### We counted

- **174** Directors
- **208** Authors
- **706** Cast members
- **111** Set designers
- **90** Lighting designers
- **141** Sound designers
- **109** Costume designers
- Total **1539** ( *...and in addition, a total of **264** stage managers* )

## Summary of Findings

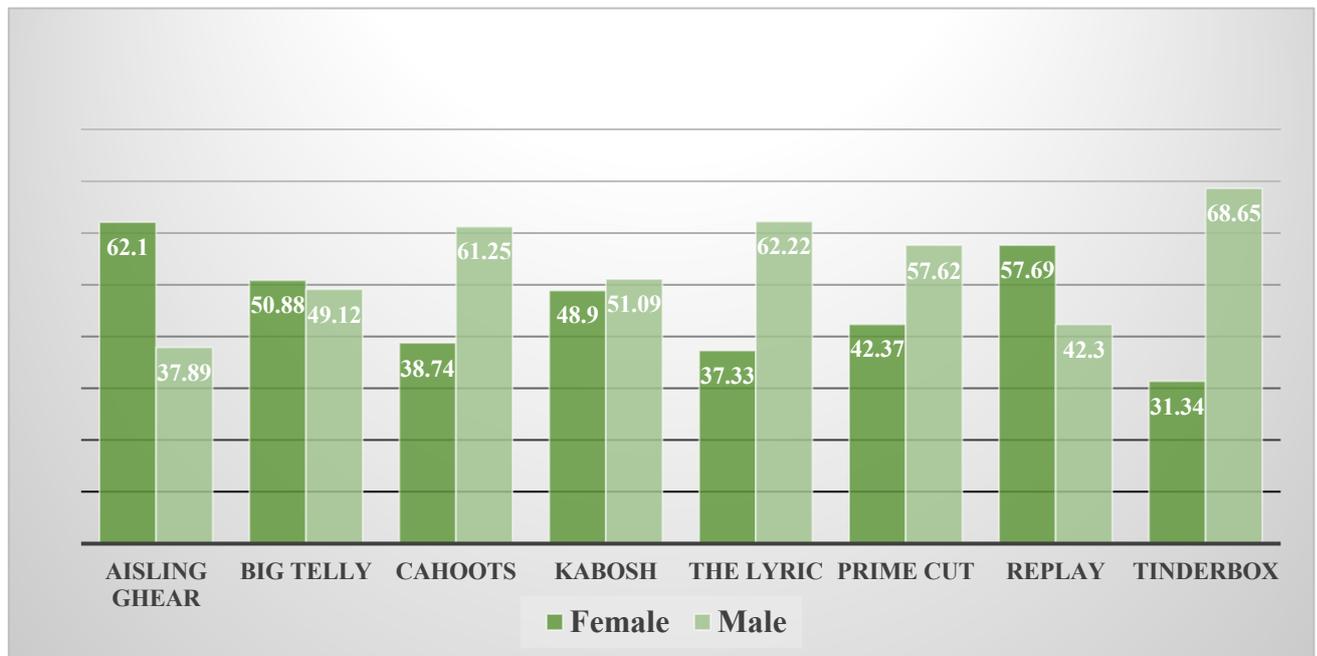
**Fig 1. Percentage breakdown across total of all key creative roles surveyed<sup>xxxiii</sup>**



- **The totals of female representation indicate that overall, women are underrepresented within the core funded theatre companies surveyed. (44.75%). Within individual theatre companies, different breakdown patterns emerge. These tables are based on original statistical analysis and presentation by Dr Gemma Cherry.**

## Summary of Findings

**Fig 2: Gender breakdown across all of the creative roles in each of the eight ACNI core funded companies<sup>xxxiv</sup>**



- Two companies: **Aisling Ghear (62.10%)**, and **Replay (57.69%)** have clear higher overall percentages of female representation.
- **Big Telly** and **Kabosh's** figures approach parity with overall female representation, with **Big Telly (50.88%)** being slightly higher overall and **Kabosh (48.90%)** slightly lower overall.
- **Prime Cut (42.37%)**, **Cahoots, (38.74%)** and **The Lyric (37.33%)** have lower overall percentages of female representation, with **Tinderbox (31.34%)** at the lowest.

## Summary of Findings



It should be noted that quantitative data can only provide a partial picture – especially when the companies surveyed vary so much in their creative, production and presentation modes and in size. In numerical terms the Lyric is the largest producer and employer and also has more categories of roles than other companies. Percentages must be thus be read with a little bit of caution as the numbers involved for some companies will be small.

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

### DIRECTORS <sup>xxxv</sup>

- **Fig. 3: The gender breakdown of directors in all ACNI core funded theatres**



- As highlighted at the beginning of our report, five of the eight companies surveyed have a female artistic director, resulting in an overall percentage of **63.77%**.
- In most companies the artistic director is responsible for directing all the companies productions thus: **Aisling Ghear, Big Telly, Kabosh and Prime Cut** report **100.0%** frequency of female representation. Each of these companies have a female artistic director and over the period surveyed, these directors were responsible for directing 100.0% of their main production shows.

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

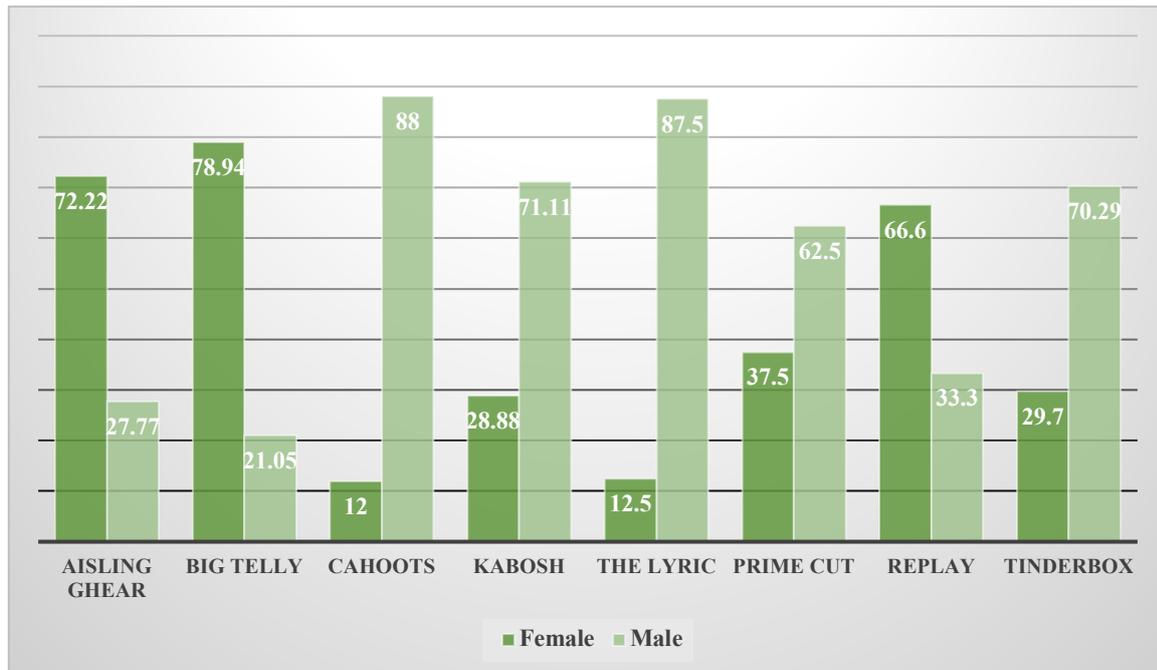
### Directors (Cont'd)

- Both **Cahoots** and **Tinderbox** have male artistic directors who have also been responsible for directing **100.0%** of their shows.<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- **Replay**'s female artistic director has directed the majority of the company's shows, but with a number of productions directed by male guest directors. This brings the final percentage of Replay's shows directed by a female director to **87.5%**.
- The exception is the **Lyric Theatre Belfast**, which operates a different mode of production: there is an Executive Producer who also directs a number of plays produced on the main stage, but not all of them. Frequently, Lyric productions have guest directors attached. Here, the number of female directors for the years surveyed drops to **29.72%**
- There is currently an overrepresentation of women within the group sampled.
- Despite a high representation of female directors, this does not automatically result in a raised representation of female theatre practitioners across all other roles.

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

### Authors<sup>xxxvii</sup>

- **Fig. 4: The gender breakdown of authors in all theatres**

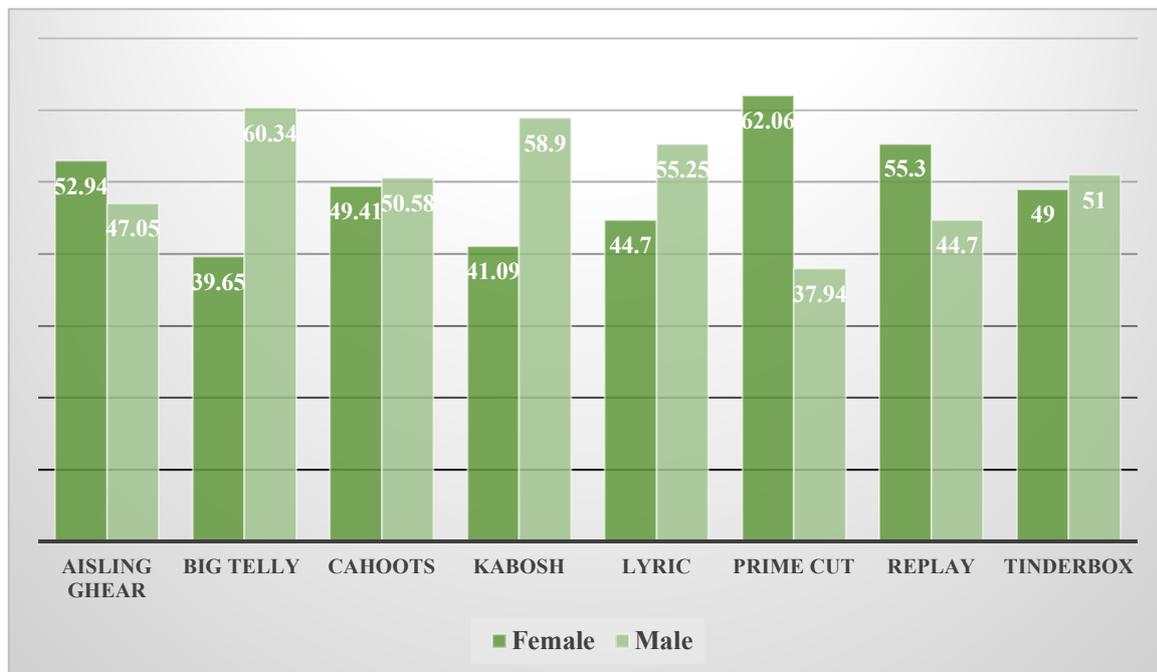


- The overall percentage for female authors is **36.78%**. There are, however, some variations within companies.
- **Big Telly (78.94%), Aisling Ghear (72.22%) and Replay(66.6%)** report an overrepresentation of female authors.
- **The Lyric (12.5%) and Cahoots (12.0%)** presented the lowest figures at this time.

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

### Cast<sup>xxxviii</sup>

- **Fig 5: The gender breakdown of cast in all theatres**



- Overall figures for cast suggest a figure approaching parity between female and male representation: What cannot be ascertained from these figures are the size and or status of roles or indeed the age breakdown of those playing them.

**Overall percentage for female cast:**

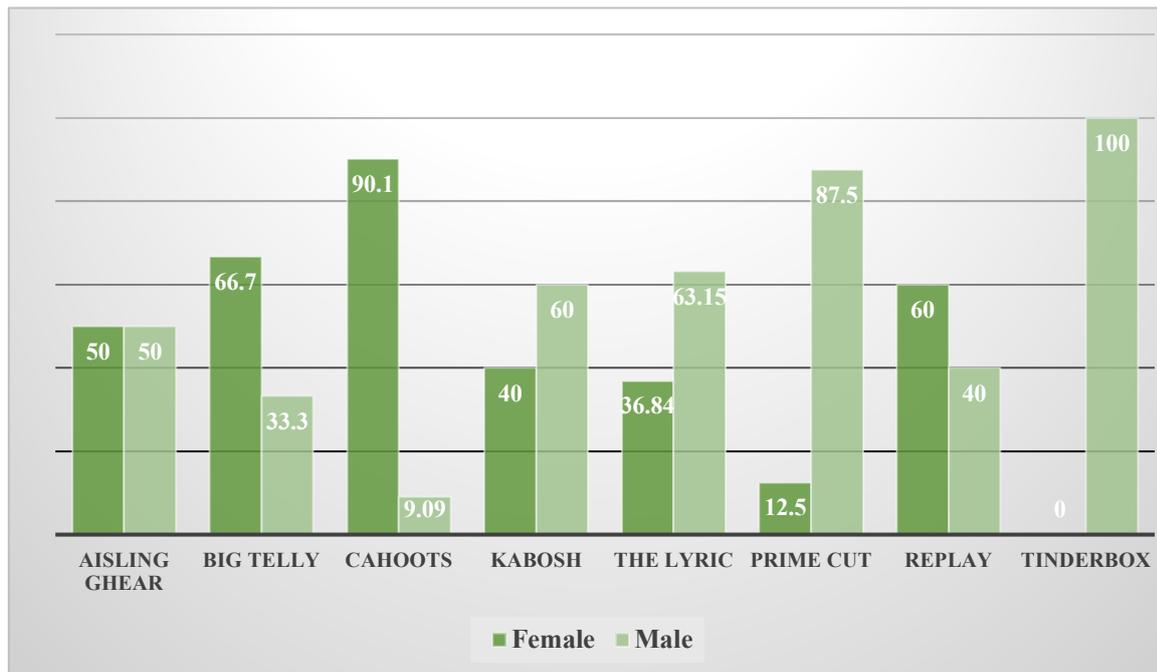
**46.83%**

- **Prime Cut** and **Replay** have the highest level of female cast at **62.06%** and **55.29%** respectively.
- **Aisling Ghear** and **Cahoots** are approaching parity **52.94%** and **49.41%** respectively.
- The **Lyric**, **Kabosh** and **Big Telly** report the lowest percentages at **44.7%**, **41.09%** and **39.65%** respectively.

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

### Set Designer

- **Fig 6: The gender breakdown of set designers in all theatres**

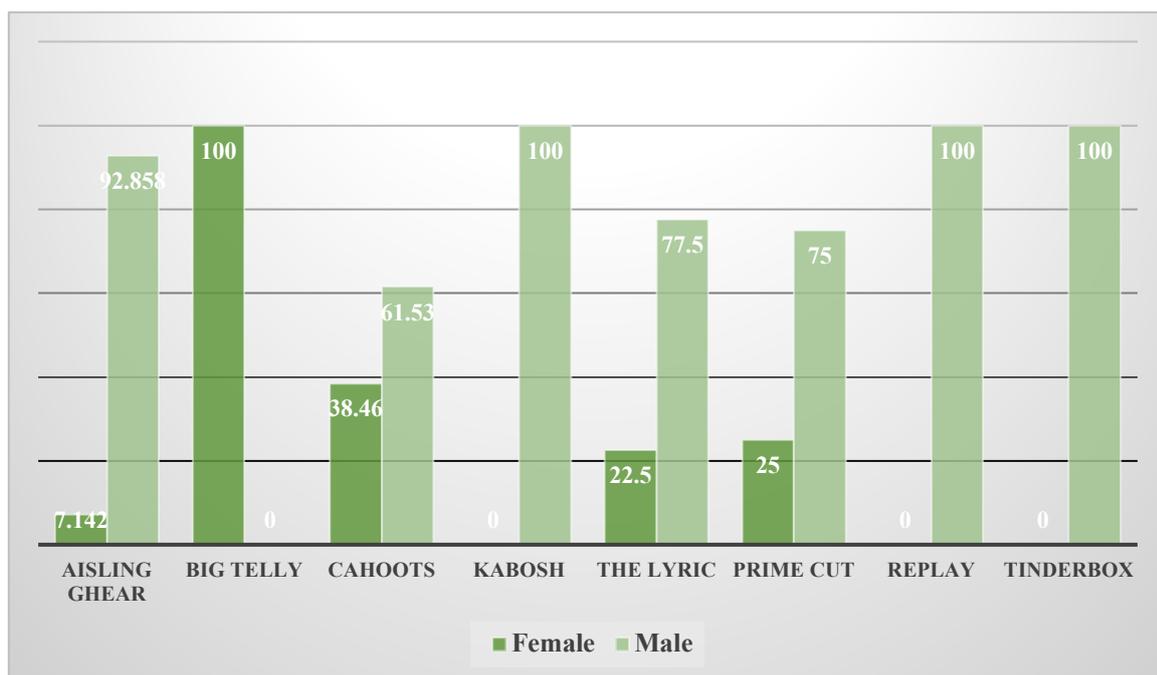


- The overall percentage for female set designer across all theatres is **40.51%**.
- Although this shows an underrepresentation of women, a number of companies have a high overrepresentation. For example, **Cahoots** has the highest representation at **90.9%** followed by **Big Telly (66.6%)**, and **Replay (60%)**.
- Aisling Ghear has an equal amount of men and women designers
- The lowest percentages are at **Kabosh, (40.0%)** **The Lyric (36.84%)**, **Prime Cut (12.5%)** and **Tinderbox (0.0%)**

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

### Lighting Designer:

- **Fig 7: The gender breakdown of Lighting designers in all theatres**

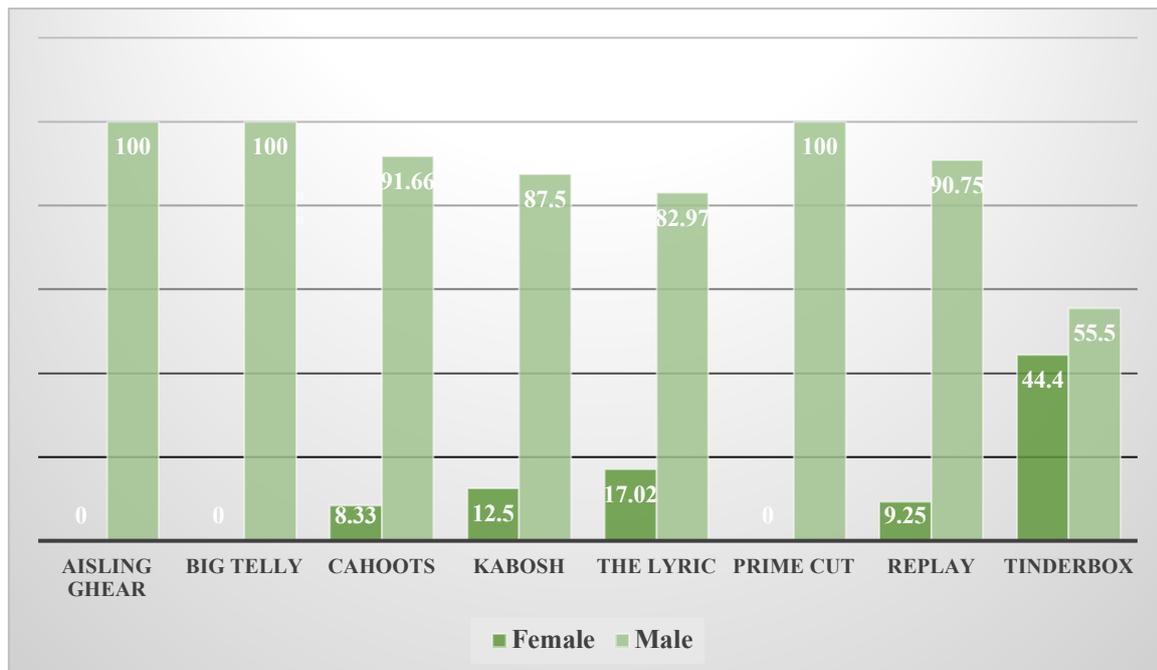


- The overall figure for female representation in LX design is **21.65%**
- Many companies report very high male representation percentages for this role apart from **Big Telly** which has **100.0%** female representation. Caution should be applied to this figure as it is based on one show where a lighting designer has been used.
- The same is true for **Replay** which reports **100.0%** male representation and **Aisling Ghear** which had one female lighting designer sharing a role with a male designer for one production.

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

### Sound Design<sup>xxxix</sup>

- **Fig 8: The gender breakdown of sound designers in all theatres**



- Overall percentage of representation for female sound designers: **12.41%**
- In line with the methodology of *Gender Counts*, both the category of sound design and composer were combined. Had only the category of sound design been included, and composer discounted, the total percentage would have been significantly lower at **6.81%**
- **Tinderbox** has the closest to parity at **44.4%**.
- **The Lyric, Cahoots, Kabosh** and **Replay** all recorded figures under **20.0%**
- Three of the eight companies recorded no female sound designers during the period surveyed; **Aisling Ghear, Big Telly** and **Prime Cut**.

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

### Costume Design

- **Fig 9: The gender breakdown of costume designers in all theatres**



- The polarity of figures found in the sound design category is almost reversed in the role of costume designer
- **Overall percentage female costume designer: 78.88%.**
- Three companies; **Aisling Ghear, Big Telly and Cahoots** record **100.0%** female representation within the costume category
- **Replay, Kabosh and the Lyric** record high percentages at **89.47%, 78.57%** and **72.97%** respectively.
- **Tinderbox and Prime Cut** record the lowest: **57.14%** and **44.4%** respectively.

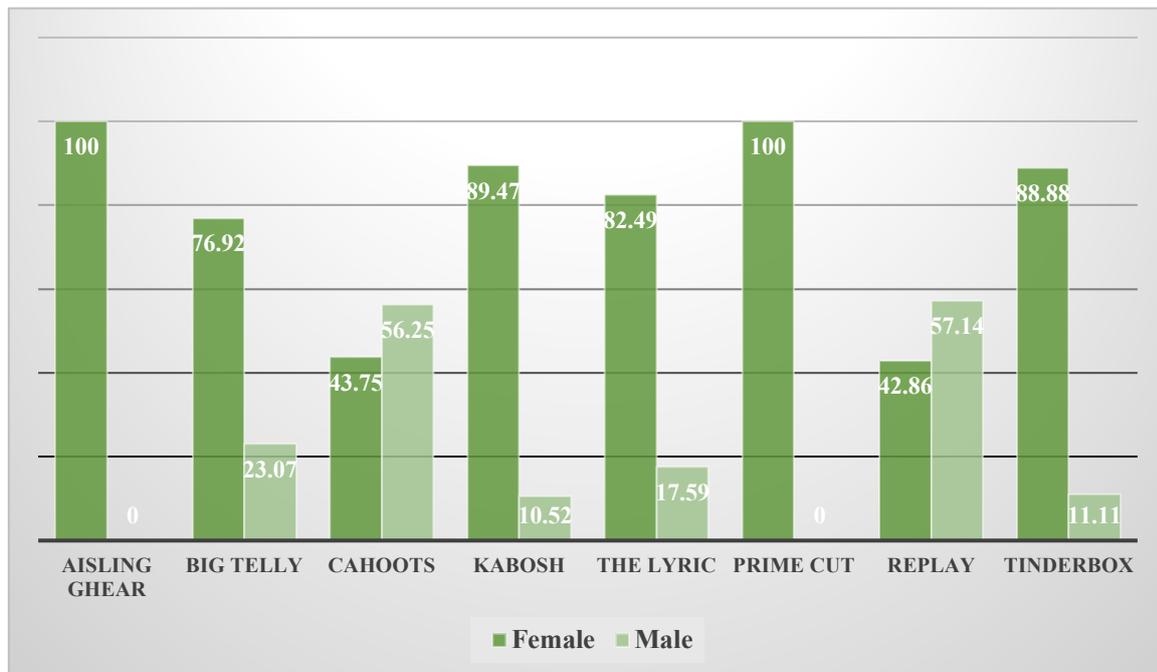
## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in each of the key creative roles

### Some additional notes on design

- Although female theatre practitioners are under-represented in total across all of the design roles, there is a great polarity in the different sections, particularly sound, lighting and costume, the latter being the only category where women are significantly overrepresented. Set design, at 40.0% is the least polarised role within all the design categories.
- The survey also found that male designers are more likely to double up design roles on a production, most frequently for set and lighting design (they were counted separately for each distinct role). On occasion, it was for set and costume design. Whilst there are also examples of female designers doubling roles (most often in set and costume design), it is less frequent. They are more likely to take just on one design role than two and the single role is most likely to be that of costume designer.
- Despite variations within individual theatre companies, the Headcount finds that, overall, women are underrepresented across all key creative roles within the core funded theatre companies surveyed. **(44.75%)**.

## Summary of Findings: Gender frequency in Production

### Stage Management



- **The overall percentage female Stage Management 81.36%**
- **Aisling Ghear and Prime Cut both record 100.0%** female representation
- **Kabosh: 89.475%, Tinderbox: 88.88%, The Lyric: 82.47% and Big Telly 76.92%** also record very high frequency of female representation.
- Only **Cahoots 43.75%** and **Replay 42.86%** report lower figures for female representation in this role.
- What this data does not reveal is the average age range of those women occupying this role or indication of career longevity.<sup>x1</sup>

## Gender Breakdown by Company

**Aisling Ghear.** Established in 1997. <https://www.aislingghear.com>

General Manager: Carrie-Anne McAlonan-McCrudden. Artistic Director: Brid Ó Gallchoir.

- Total AFP funding (over 5 years): **£369,415.00**
- Average p/a: **£73,883.00**
- % of total AFP funding **4.036%**
- Total Female representation across all creative roles in Aisling Ghear: **62.10%**
- Organisation type: Northern Ireland's only Irish Language company. Resident in the Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich Irish language arts and cultural centre in West Belfast. The company also tours extensively. Aisling Ghear produces literary theatre consisting of a mix of new writing and plays in repertoire. The scripted plays are usually the work of one playwright and the work produced ranges from historic to contemporary. Aisling Ghear produces a high percentage of female authors.
- The company's small size indicates a high degree of multi roleing especially for stage management tasks in non-theatre-venue based shows.

### **Female representation across seven key creative roles in Aisling Ghear**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>   | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b> | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>100.0%</b>   | <b>72.22%</b> | <b>52.94%</b> | <b>50.0%</b> | <b>7.142%</b>   | <b>0.0%</b>  | <b>100.0%</b>  |

### **Female representation across seven key creative roles in all companies**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>    | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b>  | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>63.77%</b>   | <b>36.78%</b> | <b>46.83%</b> | <b>40.51%</b> | <b>21.65%</b>   | <b>12.41%</b> | <b>78.87%</b>  |

**Frequency of female representation in stage management: 100.0%**

## Gender Breakdown by Company

**Big Telly** Established in 1986 by Zoe Seaton

<https://www.big-telly.com>

General and Project Managers: Fran Porter, Louise Rossington, Collette Quigley

Current Artistic director : Zoe Seaton

- Total AFP funding (over 5 years): **£736,346**
- Average p/a: **£147,269**;
- % of total AFP funding **8.045%**
- Overall female representation in company's key creative roles: **50.88%**
- Organisation type: Professional touring theatre. Multi venue, specialising in site responsive and participatory theatre across Northern Ireland. The only theatre company surveyed based outside of Belfast, based in Portstewart. Zoe Seaton, who founded the company in 1986, has remained artistic director since.

### **Female Representation across seven key creative roles in Big Telly**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b>  | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>   | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b> | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>100.0%</b>   | <b>78.94.%</b> | <b>39.65%</b> | <b>66.7%</b> | <b>100.0%</b>   | <b>0.0%</b>  | <b>100.0%</b>  |

### **Female representation across seven key creative roles in all companies**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>    | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b>  | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>63.77%</b>   | <b>36.78%</b> | <b>46.83%</b> | <b>40.51%</b> | <b>21.65%</b>   | <b>12.41%</b> | <b>78.87%</b>  |

**Frequency of female representation in Stage Management:**

**76.92%**

## Gender Breakdown by Company

**CahootsNI.** Established in 2001 by Paul McEneaney & Zoe Seaton <https://cahootsni.com>

Creative engagement Manager: Emma Wilson. Artistic director: Paul McEneaney

- Total AFP funding (over 5 years): **£596,544**
- Average p/a: **£119,308.80**
- % of total AFP funding: **6.51%**
- Overall female representation company's key creative roles: **38.74%**
- Organisation type: CahootsNI is a Belfast based company producing Theatre for children, young people and their families. Shows are created according to age and audience requirement, so work might be based on a script or devised. Shows also combine magic, illusion, physical theatre and original music.
- Cahoots NI tours across the island of Ireland and the UK and has an extensive international presence.

### **Female Representation across seven key creative roles in Cahoots NI**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>    | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b> | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>0.0%</b>     | <b>12.0%</b>  | <b>49.41%</b> | <b>90.09%</b> | <b>38.46%</b>   | <b>8.33%</b> | <b>100.0%</b>  |

### **Female representation across seven key creative roles in all companies**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>    | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b>  | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>63.77%</b>   | <b>36.78%</b> | <b>46.83%</b> | <b>40.51%</b> | <b>21.65%</b>   | <b>12.41%</b> | <b>78.87%</b>  |

**Frequency of female representation in Stage Management:**

**42.10%**

## Gender Breakdown by Company

**Kabosh** Founded in 1994 by Karl Wallace (Artistic director 1994 - 2006 )

General Manager: Andrew Hume (August 2021)      Artistic Director: Paula McFetridge

(2006 - present) <https://kabosh.net>

- Total AFP funding (over 5 years): **£340,583**
- Average p/a: **£68,116.60**
- % of total AFP funding: **3.72%**
- Overall female representation company's key creative roles: **48.90%**
- Organisation type: Kabosh produce plays in both a traditional theatre format and for site specific productions in a variety of locations across the island of Ireland and internationally.
- Much of the work addresses the legacy of conflict, but also creates work with a relevance to cultural tourism and history.
- The company has a focus on scripted new writing.

### **Female Representation across seven key creative roles in Kabosh**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>   | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b> | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>100.0%</b>   | <b>28.88%</b> | <b>41.09%</b> | <b>40.0%</b> | <b>0.0%</b>     | <b>12.5%</b> | <b>78.57%</b>  |

### **Female representation across seven key creative roles in all companies**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>    | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b>  | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>63.77%</b>   | <b>36.78%</b> | <b>46.83%</b> | <b>40.51%</b> | <b>21.65%</b>   | <b>12.41%</b> | <b>78.87%</b>  |

**Frequency of female representation in Stage Management:**

**81.48%**

## Gender Breakdown by Company

### **The Lyric**

<https://lyrictheatre.co.uk>

Founded in 1951 by Mary O'Malley and Pearse O'Malley

Senior Producer: Morag Keating

Executive Producer: Jimmy Fay (2014 – present).

- Total AFP funding (over 5 years): **£ 4,946,789**
- Average p/a: **£989,357.8**
- % of total AFP funding: **54.048%**
- Overall female representation company's key creative roles: **37.33%**
- Organisation type: The principal producing theatre in Northern Ireland, based in Belfast. The first venue was in the O'Malley's home, Derryvolgie Avenue, in Belfast. The Lyric opened at its purpose-built site in Ridgeway Street in 1968. The Lyric has now occupied the site in Ridgeway Street for 53 years, commemorating fifty years in 2018. During those fifty years the original theatre was demolished and a new one was opened in 2011.
- Of the numerous artistic directors during its history, (some with short-lived tenures), only one other woman, Paula McFetridge, has been Artistic director at The Lyric (2001-2006).
- There are two performance spaces, the main Danske Banke Auditorium (389 seats) and The Naughton Studio (170 seats), which predominantly hosts outside companies and touring productions. The majority of productions counted for this survey were those put on the main stage.

## **Gender Breakdown by Company**

### **The Lyric (cont'd)**

#### **Female Representation across seven key creative roles in the Lyric**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>  | <b>Set</b>    | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b>  | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>29.72%</b>   | <b>12.5%</b>  | <b>44.7%</b> | <b>36.84%</b> | <b>22.5%</b>    | <b>17.02%</b> | <b>72.97%</b>  |

#### **Female representation across seven key creative roles in all companies**

| <b>Director</b> | <b>Author</b> | <b>Cast</b>   | <b>Set</b>    | <b>Lighting</b> | <b>Sound</b>  | <b>Costume</b> |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>63.77%</b>   | <b>36.78%</b> | <b>46.83%</b> | <b>40.51%</b> | <b>21.65%</b>   | <b>12.41%</b> | <b>78.87%</b>  |

**Frequency of female representation in Stage Management:**

**82.39%**

## Gender Breakdown by Company

### Prime Cut Productions

<https://www.primecutproductions.co.uk>

Established in 1992, as Mad Cow Productions by Simon Magill and Jackie Doyle, changing its name to Prime Cut in 1997.

Executive Producer: Úna Nic Eoin                      Artistic Director: Emma Jordan (2005- present).

- Total AFP funding (over 5 years): **£760,255**
- Average p/a: **£152,051.00**
- % of total AFP funding: **8.306%**
- Overall female representation company's key creative roles: **42.37%**
- Organisation type: Producing Irish and international plays. Prime Cut produces and co-produces shows for traditional theatre venues, touring in community halls, schools and for site specific productions
- Initially weighted towards established playwrights, much of the work produced is new writing.
- Productions play across Ireland the UK and increasingly, internationally.

#### Female Representation across seven key creative roles in Prime Cut

| Director | Author | Cast   | Set   | Lighting | Sound | Costume |
|----------|--------|--------|-------|----------|-------|---------|
| 100.0%   | 37.5%  | 62.06% | 12.5% | 25.0%    | 0.0%  | 44.4%   |

#### Female representation across seven key creative roles in all companies

| Director | Author | Cast   | Set    | Lighting | Sound  | Costume |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|---------|
| 63.77%   | 36.78% | 46.83% | 40.51% | 21.65%   | 12.41% | 78.87%  |

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**Frequency of female representation in Stage Management:                      100.0%**

## Gender Breakdown by Company

### Replay Theatre Company

<https://www.replaytheatre.co.uk>

Founded by Brenda Winter-Palmer in 1988.

Chief Executive Officer: Brian Mullan;

Artistic Director: Janice Kernoghan-Reid (2016- present).

- Total AFP funding (over 5 years): **£727,770**
- Average p/a: **£145,554.00**
- % of total AFP funding: **7.951%**
- Overall female representation company's key creative roles: **57.69%**
- Organisation type: Replay produces theatre for audiences under the age of 19. These include babies, teenagers and primary school children; children and young people with complex multiple disabilities. Work can be produced for a traditional theatre or specific sites such as class room, hall within an educational venue, warehouse venues, festivals. New writing and devised work feature heavily.
- Replay tours Northern Ireland and has performed internationally.

#### Female Representation across seven key creative roles in Replay

| Director | Author | Cast   | Set   | Lighting | Sound | Costume |
|----------|--------|--------|-------|----------|-------|---------|
| 87.5%    | 66.6%  | 55.29% | 60.0% | 0.0%     | 9.25% | 89.47%  |

#### Female representation across seven key creative roles in all companies

| Director | Author | Cast   | Set    | Lighting | Sound  | Costume |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|---------|
| 63.77%   | 36.78% | 46.83% | 40.51% | 21.65%   | 12.41% | 78.87%  |

Frequency of female representation in Stage Management:

**42.85%**

## Gender Breakdown by Company

### Tinderbox

<https://www.tinderbox.org.uk>

Founded: 1988 by Tim Loane & Stephen Wright.

Producer: Meg Magill (2021-) Artistic Director Patrick J. O' Reilly (2016 – present).

- Total AFP funding (over 5 years): **£674,819**
- Average p/a: **£134,963.80**
- % of total AFP funding: **7.099%**
- Overall female representation company's key creative roles: **31.34%**
- Initially, Tinderbox mainly produced work by established playwrights, gradually including newer work from the island of Ireland. Under Mick Duke (2005-2016) and Dramaturg Hanna Slatne, (2005-2018) the company further developed its identity as a producer of literary theatre, focusing on new playwriting. In more recent years, the company has recalibrated under the Artistic direction of Patrick J O' Reilly, moving away from solely literary theatre to a blend of physical, scripted, devised and adapted new work.

#### Female Representation across seven key creative roles in Replay

| Director | Author | Cast  | Set  | Lighting | Sound | Costume |
|----------|--------|-------|------|----------|-------|---------|
| 0.0%     | 29.70% | 49.0% | 0.0% | 0.0%     | 0.0%  | 44.4%   |

#### Female representation across seven key creative roles in all companies

| Director | Author | Cast   | Set    | Lighting | Sound  | Costume |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|---------|
| 63.77%   | 36.78% | 46.83% | 40.51% | 21.65%   | 12.41% | 78.87%  |

Frequency of female representation in Stage Management:

**88.88%**

# WAKING THE FEMINISTS NI

## Conclusion

This report has described and analysed the collected quantitative data on the gender breakdown in eight ACNI core funded theatre companies. In doing so, it has revealed a complex picture of gender imbalance, revealing both underrepresentation of women overall and the overrepresentation of women in certain key roles, most notably, but not exclusively, in costume design. Nevertheless, the percentage of women in place across the seven key creative roles in all companies stands at **44.75%**. Three theatre companies in particular report a frequency of female representation over 50%. These include **Aisling Ghear, Replay** and **Big Telly**. In addition, it might seem surprising (and encouraging) to report that the role of **theatre director** across all the companies also has a high frequency of female representation (**63.77%**). We have added the figures of Stage Management to this (**81.36%**) in the hope that this might encourage further in-depth data collection and analysis of the gender breakdown of production and crews within the theatre sector. It can be gleaned from the gathered data, however that a higher frequency of female representation in the role of Theatre Director does not automatically guarantee a corresponding uplift across other key roles although figures do vary between companies.

As might be expected, whilst the data presented has provided some concrete evidence of gender imbalance within eight core funded theatres in Northern Ireland, it has also provoked new questions, and hopefully these will act as springboards to further enquiry. For example, whilst the high frequency of women in the role of director can be accounted for partially by the fact that artistic directors are responsible for directing the majority of their productions, we do not know what other factors have contributed to this percentage of women occupying the role at this time and over a number of years.<sup>xli</sup> As previously

mentioned, three companies have a higher frequency of female representation overall. Two of these companies create devised work alongside scripted work – it might be conjectured that this way of working has a bearing on the numbers of women employed. This is not the case for Aisling Ghear, however, who work with playscripts written by a playwright, yet have a high percentage of female authors.<sup>xliii</sup> There is no clear link at present, if indeed there should be. What is clear however is that the Lyric, which is the highest funded company, has some of the lowest figures for female representation, particularly in the role of director and author.

### **Northern Ireland's theatre sector.**

As mentioned earlier, it is important to remember the context in which theatre is made here and that the arts sector as a whole in Northern Ireland has always existed and produced work within a landscape of scarcity. From its formation in 1921, through the “armed patriarchy of The Troubles”,<sup>xliiii</sup> (though some would argue the patriarchy here was armed before and since), many societal, cultural and legal factors have contributed to Northern Ireland being a place apart within the UK and on the island of Ireland. Whilst a number of long-standing gender inequalities enshrined in Northern Irish law were overturned in 2019, including those governing abortion, equal marriage and domestic violence; full implementation of some of these laws is yet to happen in practice.<sup>xliv</sup> Just as we seem to be in a ‘twilight zone’ with our laws, we seem to be in a similar position as artists and arts institutions and this was the case long before Brexit and the existential crisis of the Covid pandemic.<sup>xlv</sup> There has never been a cohesive Northern Ireland Government or Executive-led cultural policy here leaving the arts sector at the mercy of what has been termed a culture of ‘avoidance and ambiguity’.<sup>xlvi</sup> Chronic underfunding of the arts (not simply as a response to austerity measures) has made an impact on the theatre sector as a whole, and core funded companies have not been immune

to this; most having had standstill funding, which in real terms, has often amounted to a cut. As I have previously mentioned, the reality of day to day “firefighting” leaves little time or appetite to engage with inequalities within theatre institutions and this has been compounded recently by the wide-ranging economic and social measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns over Brexit. Although a number of measures at UK governmental level have been brought in to mitigate the effects of prolonged closure and unemployment due to the pandemic, (and, to a more contentious degree, for Brexit) the future continues to be uncertain. In the wake of this, historic precarities and inequalities are set to deepen and so this research is timelier than ever. Of course, one cannot lay the blame of ongoing gender inequality in Northern Irish theatre solely at the door of our unique socio-political, historical and geographical circumstances, no matter how much they might compound the problem! Hetero - patriarchal societal norms have been in operation for millennia, the world over. These norms have been reflected and replicated in the structures and hierarchies of theatre that are rooted in the origins of theatre itself. To put it more simply, they are the source of the “unconscious bias” that perpetuates at individual and institutional level despite avowed best intentions to change, keeping things exactly as they have always been. It is compounded by the fact that even at the best of times, theatre is a time-pressurised endeavour. Choices are made according to who is able to deliver to deadlines efficiently and punctually. Little wonder organisations reach out to those they have worked with before and with whom they have built up a working “shorthand”. It is easy to lose sight of the enormity and insidiousness of this problem when tackling gender and other inequalities; but recognising that it is systemic in nature is a first step toward change. Recognising also, that sustainable change isn’t simply going to happen by adding a few female playwrights or cast members to a season or adding yet another women’s festival or showcase on a programme. There isn’t a “quick fix”. There is no room for blame or complacency on the part of institutions or individuals but

for cohesive collective measures across the sector in order to reimagine new ways of working. It is not enough, as Cathy Leeney states, to just ‘add women and stir’ the ‘patriarchal–canonical pot’.<sup>xlvii</sup> If we simply focus on a “numbers game” without examining the way in which theatre is created and produced then we are going to replicate the same mistakes and abuses over time.<sup>xlviii</sup> The imperative for self- interrogation and reflection has become more urgent in the wake of the COVID pandemic. As Gemma Tipton remarked in the Irish Times, ‘The model of theatre making has been broken for a long time’... and even prior to the pandemic ‘the levels of overwork and underpay in theatre had reached critical conditions’.<sup>xlix</sup> As theatres begin to open again, the question is do we wish to go back to the old ‘normal’ of pre-COVID 19, or whether it is time for new practices to be implemented in theatre production.<sup>1</sup>

### **The effects of COVID 19**

Theatre runs on freelance labour, usually employed on a project - by - project basis by relatively small teams of theatre company staff on full time or long - term contracts.<sup>li</sup> This is often overlooked, and during the early days of the pandemic, media attention and funding initiatives were focused towards saving and maintaining institutions and core companies, seeing them as solely representative of the arts sector. The huge demand on the ACNI’s ‘Support for the individual artist’ scheme last May, told a different story. The number of Northern Irish based freelancers in need of support had been underestimated, and the numbers applying quickly overwhelmed the system. The scheme closed abruptly before the final application date.<sup>lii</sup> Freelancers have borne the brunt of the social and economic costs of the pandemic and they will continue to do so for many years to come. In spite of this, what was notable was the amount of grassroots campaigns organised amongst individual artists to help mitigate the overwhelming difficulties they faced. One example was the ‘Bread and

Butter Fund’, organised by playwrights Abbie Spallen and Finn Kennedy which raised £10,000 within days. This attracted media attention and a further £10,000 was added to the fund by the Department of Communities.<sup>liii</sup> Initiatives such as this helped to redress the balance in a small way and also to provide mutual support for fellow freelancers who were desperate at the loss of work and any form of income for the future. As Lyn Gardner identified in *The Stage*, however, this was another iteration of already established practice:

‘...[o]ne of the things the Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated is the extent to which poorly paid artists use their own time and limited resources to help artists less fortunate than themselves. Crowdfunding culture has exacerbated that with theatre’s poor giving to theatre’s poorer’.<sup>liv</sup>

So how does one stop the cycle of “out of the frying pan, into the fire”, especially as the theatre sector emerges from a year and a half of venue closures and event cancellations?<sup>lv</sup> There have been some positives: a number of Northern Irish theatre companies have created small-scale funding opportunities and schemes in response to the pandemic restrictions;<sup>lvi</sup> these have forged some new relationships between individual artists and institutions. During the past year and a half, theatre making has evolved onto different multi-media platforms, fusing recorded with live performance and creating myriad online productions.<sup>lvii</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that much of this new work has been created by female theatre practitioners.<sup>lviii</sup> The danger is that the “COVID showcase” presents a sleight of hand, a convincing impression of wide representation, dissipating any impetus to move and sustain women’s work on to the main stage.

### **Recommendations for future action.**

*Gender Counts* listed three areas of action identified by Waking the Feminists in the campaign for gender parity within the theatre:

- A sustained policy for inclusion with action plan and measurable results;
  - Equal championing and advancement of women artists;
  - Economic parity for all working in the theatre.
- Nearly six years on, equality policies, action plans and significant work towards the “championing and advancement of women artists” within the Republic’s theatre institutions has been undertaken.<sup>lix</sup> The *Gender Counts Interim Report (2020)* makes further recommendations:
- The implementation of a standardised template across the sector for counting, recording, and publishing gender statistics;
  - That theatre organisations ensure that they track gender figures across creative roles. Some organisations have only provided statistics for selected roles, and we recommend that all roles be tracked;
  - That the gender pay gap be tracked alongside gender representation statistics in order to give a fuller view of gender equality.
  - That gender representation should continue to be a key consideration for the planning of future and proposed productions.<sup>lx</sup>

### WTFNI recommendations:

- The journey to the publication of this report has been slow and was made possible by the research work of just five freelance theatre practitioners. For the continuance of future research and in order to progress the aims and objectives as outlined above, a wider support network needs to be built. It is recommended that a collaborative working relationship is formed between WTFNI or similar research entity, individual practitioners, representatives from theatre and academic institutions, arts funding bodies and advocacy organisations.<sup>lxi</sup>
- It is recommended that, for future surveys theatre companies use a standardised self-survey form constructed in consultation with a research group. The original survey form used by WTFNI's research team during this first survey could be used as template and adapted as required for future use.<sup>lxii</sup>
- *Gender Counts* (2017) recommended ongoing action on economic parity for all working within theatre, and on tracking the gender pay gap;
- WTFNI recognises the intersectional nature of freelance precarity as it disproportionately affects groups marginalised on grounds of gender, race, age, disability and sexuality, rendering them vulnerable economically and to inequitable work conditions, including bullying and harassment.<sup>lxiii</sup> WTFNI recommends that in addition to economic parity, there is a need to recognise the need for parity of terms and conditions for all working within the theatre.<sup>lxiv</sup> <sup>lxv</sup> Intertwined with this are a number of other issues that warrant wider discussion from an equality-parity

perspective: one of these is the relationship between freelancers and theatre companies in the approach to work (casting and job recruitment); another might be the equality implications for older practitioners seeking artistic/career development.<sup>lxvi</sup> Thirdly, the promotion of a greater awareness of Northern Ireland based female theatre practitioners (for example, playwrights and publication initiatives).

### **A final thought**

Deborah Dean states that “Unlike most occupations in society, professional performing has been a gender-integrated occupation for several hundred years”.<sup>lxvii</sup> So why have women made such little headway in it? Maybe it is because 360 years is actually a very short span of time onstage or backstage when patriarchal thinking has lived “rent free” in women’s heads for millennia.<sup>lxviii</sup> Much gender inequality is internalised, made up of an acceptance that this is the way the world is, that the “theatrical canon” is the yardstick by which excellence is measured and this is the only “excellence” that matters. Dismantling this type of thinking can be a life’s work. It requires stamina and vigilance – and bravery, particularly on the part of individual artists. *The Headcount Report*, along with other quantitative and qualitative research, makes a start at identifying what has been “hiding in plain sight” for so long. It has a part to play, however small, in dismantling the beliefs that are engrained in us all, whether we identify as feminists or not. May it provide some stamina and a bit of courage too, for the journey ahead.

Some of the WTFNI research team carrying the *Waking the Feminists NI* banner, designed by member Liz Cullinane. We were taking part in Artichoke theatre company's "Processions" 10<sup>th</sup> June 2018, to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the "Representation of the People Act" giving women in the UK partial enfranchisement.



l-r Maggie Cronin, Writer, Actor Director

Liz Cullinane, Artist, Designer and Writer

Vittoria Cafolla, Playwright and Screenwriter

Louise Parker, Actor and Playwright

Standing in front, Giovanna Cafolla, future artist, feminist and world leader in waiting.

(Not in photo: Caoileann Curry-Thompson, Playwright, currently Acting Head of Drama Arts Council NI).

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> P2. One difference from the original WTF survey was that, in the case of shared authorship, source material such as an original book or play was counted in. The author share was counted, if that author was still in copyright. For more details see Methodology section. (P 3 Headcount Headlines)
- <sup>ii</sup> P2. *Gender Counts* surveys a ten-year span from 2005-2016. *The Headcount* surveys five years from 2014 - 2019.
- <sup>iii</sup> P2. Murphy, CL. (2020) *5 Years On: Gender in Irish Theatre - An Interim View* (2020) (Supported by Dr Ciara O’Dowd, Dr Brenda Donohue, and Sarah Durcan). Commissioned by Waking the Feminists.
- <sup>iv</sup> P2. As part of Queen’s University Belfast’s, Athena Swan Women’s Day celebrations. This event coincided with strike action across UK universities, and the presentation took place at The Crescent Arts Centre as part of UCU’s ‘Alternative lectures’ series.
- <sup>v</sup> P4. White, A. (2012) *Me, Mollser*. Commissioned by the Abbey Theatre and performed as part of the Abbey’s schools and educational initiative **Priming the Canon**, looking at a single character within a major play.
- <sup>vi</sup> P4. Dawe, O (2020) *Converting Advocacy to Action: #WakingTheFeminists Legacy* Irish Journal of Arts management and cultural policy, 2019-2020 Volume 7, p30.
- <sup>vii</sup> P4. O’Kelly, Emer, Irish Independent (Nov 1<sup>st</sup> 2015) <https://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/abbey-theatre-hopes-to-wake-the-nation-in-2016-34158896.html>
- <sup>viii</sup> P4. The Abbey already had “form”; dismay greeted the programming of the Abbey’s Centenary Season in 2004. Out of the 12 full scale productions on the main stage, no play by a woman was produced and no Irish woman directed on the Abbey stage. See Sihra, M.(2016) *Shadow and substance: Women, Feminism and Irish Theatre after 1980*. The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre. eds Grene, N. Morash, C. OUP p.548.
- <sup>ix</sup> P4. Dr. Brenda Donohue, Dr. Ciara O’Dowd, Dr. Tanya Dean, Ciara Murphy, Kathleen Cawley and Kate Harris (2016) *Gender Counts*; Commissioned by Waking the Feminists
- <sup>x</sup> P4. The Abbey Theatre, Cork Midsummer Festival, Corn Exchange, Druid Theatre, The Everyman, Dublin Theatre Festival, Fishamble: The New Play Company, The Gate Theatre, The Lir Academy and Rough Magic Theatre Company (See also: Falvey, D: Irish Times (July 14<sup>th</sup> 2018). “*Yes we did!*” *Irish Theatre’s gender equality revolution*).
- <sup>xi</sup> P5. Murphy, C.L. (Nov. 2020): *5 Years On: Gender in Irish Theatre - An Interim View*. Supported by Dr Ciara O’Dowd, Dr Brenda Donohue, and Sarah Durcan
- <sup>xii</sup> P5. What was notable at this time was the lack of any collective or institutional public response from the Northern Irish theatre sector. Theatres in the Republic of Ireland were publicly changing equality policies, reviewing sexual harassment and bullying within institutions. (See Falvey, D: Irish Times, July 14<sup>th</sup> 2018, “*Yes, we did!*” *Irish Theatre’s gender equality revolution*). This was also happening in other parts of the UK, for example the Royal Court, London (See <https://royalcourttheatre.com/vicky-featherstone-releases-industry-code-behaviour-prevent-sexual-harassment-abuses-power/>) and other publicly subsidized theatres. (See: <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/your-visit/policies/sexual-harassment-policy> & <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/your-visit/policies/gender-pay-gap> ) There seemed to be no matching public initiative in the North. There were, however, initiatives such as the adoption of Performer’s Union, Equity’s, *Agenda for Change – ‘Safe Spaces’* declaration, read out at the beginning of the first day of rehearsals at the venue. (Source, Lyric Theatre Belfast).
- <sup>xiii</sup> P5. There were also a number of companies who were already working with high levels of female representation who perhaps felt that the results of *Gender Counts* were not applicable or relevant to their work.

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## Endnotes

<sup>xiv</sup> P5. Space does not allow me to give a detailed analysis as to why; again, I would point to Dawe, O; (2020): *Converting Advocacy to Action: #WakingTheFeminists Legacy* Irish Journal of Arts management and cultural policy, 2019-2020 Volume 7, p30. This excellent brief reflection of events from the viewpoint of five years later, provides some of the socio - political contexts important to the formation of WTF, and a sense of the symbolic and political importance of the Abbey Theatre within the formation of the Republic of Ireland.

<sup>xv</sup>P5. Because of this political ambivalence, it could be argued that culture is only valued as a political football in the use of “parity of esteem” argument, thus furthering division. See: Hadley, S.(2017 ‘Where Next for Cultural Policy in Northern Ireland?’ Queens policy engagement website. <http://qppl.qub.ac.uk/arts-cultural-policy-ni/> See also: Young, (Belfast Telegraph, Feb. 2108): *Sinn Fein and The DUP Clash over arts funding row*; and: Meredith, R: (BBC News NI November 2017): *European City of Culture Bid: Culture in NI used as a continuation of Conflict* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-41838993> In terms of “firefighting” most companies have had standstill funding or severe cuts over the years – including 40% cuts to Tinderbox and Kabosh. Another core funded company, Bruiser, sustained 100% cut in ACNI Annual Funding Programme funding. Bruiser is now on Lottery Project Funding and qualifies for Small Grants funds for projects. The company also successfully applied for emergency funding over 2020. (Funding information source: Arts Council of Northern Ireland).

<sup>xvi</sup> P6. Arts Council of Northern Ireland Website (July 2021) *Evidencing Need: A report on the collated evidence making the case for an arts & culture Sectoral Survival Fund for Individual Artists*. Over the course of ten years, the annual Exchequer Budget for the ACNI decreased from £14.133 million in 2011/12 to £9.52 2020/21. As previously mentioned, the arts sector has always been chronically underfunded. This is not a recent development or solely a reaction to ‘austerity measures’ although these have played a part. [http://artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/Evidencing\\_Need\\_Individuals.pdf](http://artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/Evidencing_Need_Individuals.pdf) p6.

<sup>xvii</sup> P6. a) Retrieved from the Department for the Economy website: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/local-actors-agent> b) Retrieved from BBC NI news website: “Belfast actors’ agent Mark McCrory banned for 10 years” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-40673389>

<sup>xviii</sup> P7. Donohue, B ; O’Dowd, C; Dean, T; Murphy, C L; Crawley, K; Harris, K. (2016) *Gender Counts An analysis of gender in Irish theatre 2006-2015* #Waking the Feminists p.12.

<sup>xix</sup> P9. Aisling Ghear, Big Telly, Kabosh, Prime Cut and Replay all have female artistic directors and they would account in most instances for 100% of the shows directed in their companies. Tinderbox and Cahoots have male artistic directors who, in turn, direct 100% of their shows. The Lyric currently (2021) has an Executive Producer who directs some of the theatre’s shows along with guest directors.

<sup>xx</sup> P9. Headcount Headlines: Directors. This will happen in some other categories too and will be highlighted as a percentage coming from low figures.

<sup>xxi</sup> P12. From December 2019 - March 2020, prior to the restrictions brought in place due to the COVID 19 pandemic, there was an opportunity to visit a number of the theatre companies surveyed and share an individual report of that particular company’s results. These included data on more than the seven key creative roles, including backstage occupations as well. The restrictions brought in by the COVID 19 pandemic meant that there were two outstanding companies to visit, Aisling Ghear and Replay. It is hoped that these companies will be met with soon.

<sup>xxii</sup> P12. We also note that in Murphy, CL. (2020) *5 Years On: Gender in Irish Theatre - An Interim View*, data on Stage Managers has also been added. <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/research>

<sup>xxiii</sup> P14. Including Feile, Feile an Earragh, East Side Festival, Out to Lunch, Outburst, Cathedral Quarter Festival to name a few

<sup>xxiv</sup> P15. As well as the eight producing theatres surveyed, the ACNI’s Drama portfolio also includes Theatre and Dance NI, (the only non-producing organisation).

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## Endnotes

<sup>xxv</sup> P15. To give an example of the sources of funding included in this survey: Big Telly received £150,350.00 per annum for the years 2014/15 and 2015/16. For the following year, 2016/17, the annual total of was made up of £56,196 from the Lottery AFP programme and £94,154 from the Exchequer (= £150,350.00). In 2017/18, the Lottery annual funding came in two amounts of £28,098, totalling £56,196; in addition there were two amounts of Exchequer funding: £43,537.00 and £47,077 totalling £90,614. The combined amount was £146,810. For 2018/19 the funding was: Exchequer; £56,196 and Lottery £82,290 =£138,486  
Information in PDF format can be downloaded from this page, detailing all major awards made from 2010-2020. <http://artscouncil-ni.org/funding/previous-awards> .

<sup>xxvi</sup> P16. Excluded from this table is Theatre and Dance NI (see above).

<sup>xxvii</sup> P16. When totalling up the five years' worth of funding, it was discovered that there was an anomaly between an ACNI press release and the pdf spreadsheet figures for 2017/18. The figures quoted in the press release were slightly lower than the annual awards recorded in the pdf. We have used the spreadsheet as the more accurate source. Even with these slight disparities, the table position amongst the companies would not have been altered. <http://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-council-announces-annual-funding-decisions>

<sup>xxviii</sup> P17. Equally, there is an argument for major theatre companies to look at the logistics of working outside of the traditional “flagship building” model, such as in the case of the National Theatre of Scotland.

<sup>xxix</sup> P19. Theatre administrative staff, outreach department staff and producers were also excluded from this survey, as were ancillary employees such as F.O.H, bar staff, cleaners. There is certainly an argument to be made for further surveys into the gender balance particularly of theatre admin staff – anecdotal evidence would suggest high numbers of women are employed in this sector. Likewise, anecdotal evidence would suggest a high number of women taking on producer roles within NI companies. See also Kerbel, L (2017) *All Change Please: A Practical Guide to Achieving Gender Equality in Theatre*. Nick Hern Books London.

<sup>xxx</sup> P20. This differs from the original #Waking the Feminists' *Gender Counts* methodology which gave sole authorship to the adaptor. Donohue, D. et al (2016) p17.

<sup>xxxi</sup> P20. Equity UK has a working party within the Stage Committee who are having discussions about developing guidance for devised work. At present, the following recommendation is present in the Subsidised and ITC Agreement: “Subsidised Theatre: SCHEDULE 2 – CONDITIONS FOR PERFORMERS ONLY. **5) Companies devising own work:** Before commencing work on the devising of a production, a written agreement shall be entered into with all concerned covering the further exploitation of the devised work”. This is a step towards recognition, credits and the possibility of remuneration in the future. Source: Adam Adnyana, Equity Organiser for Scotland and N. Ireland

<sup>xxxii</sup> P22. This was done through a combination of cast lists kept by companies, programme information and reviews.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> P25. Stage Management is presented as a stand - alone category – not included in the key creative role totals.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> P26. The original #WTF (2016) figures for female representation were: **Directors 37%; Authors 28%; Cast. 42%; Set designers 40%; LX Designers 34%; Sound Designers 9%; Costume designers 79%.**

<sup>xxxv</sup> P28. Director: Unlike the original WTF report, all of the productions surveyed for the Headcount had an identifiable director.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> P29. Artistic Director: There was a change of Artistic Director during the period surveyed at Tinderbox, however, both ADs were male

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## Endnotes

<sup>xxxvii</sup> P30. Author: The word author has been used in place of playwright in order to reflect the myriad ways a play can be made, including devising, improvisation and writing. This category includes single and multiple authors and we have explained above how we have measured this. WTF in their updated report ‘Five years on’ now use the term creator as well as writer to adequately reflect the variety of modes that scripts come into being. (Murphy, C.L. Nov. 2020). Perhaps given the roots of this word it should shift from meaning the individual writer to include those teams that have ‘wrought’ a play!

<sup>xxxviii</sup> P31.Cast: Whilst this survey conveys percentages of gender representation within casts, they cannot indicate the size or importance of a role, stage time or differentials in pay levels. The figures presented do not give an idea of the age ranges of cast members and whether there are age biases along with gender biases.

<sup>xxxix</sup> P34. Sound Designer: this category combines sound designers and composers. If more than one person is involved, each contribution is assumed to be equal and that is reflected in the percentages.

<sup>xl</sup>P37. Anecdotal evidence suggests that within Northern Ireland, there has been a high turnover of female stage managers, with women typically leaving in their mid – late thirties. A proportion move into theatre admin or producer roles (which might offer more regular hours, if not better rates of pay). Whilst for some, this might be linked to caring for dependents, this is not the only reason. A number leave the theatre completely and go to re-train, or to gain new qualifications in an unrelated sector. There is scope for more research on this.

<sup>xli</sup>P47. Jennings, M: (2015) *Activism and responsibility women directing theatre in contemporary Northern Ireland* in Radical contemporary theatre practices by women in Ireland eds I Miriam Haughton and Mária Kurdi. Refers to the number of women working as directors in NI and addresses some of the reasons as to why that might be.

<sup>xlii</sup> P48. A brief discussion with Aisling Ghear’s Artistic Director Brid Ó Gallchoir, was illuminating; there seems to be a higher representation of female authors, poets and playwrights as *Gaeilge*.

<sup>xliii</sup> P48. At the launch of *Her other language, Northern Irish Women Writers Address Domestic Violence and Abuse* (eds Carr, R. & Cuddington, N. 2020), Dr Monica McWilliams referred to this phrase again in her opening address, 5th March 2020.

<sup>xliv</sup> P48. In 2019, a number of long-standing gender inequalities enshrined in Northern Irish law were overturned, including those governing abortion, equal marriage and domestic violence. This was brought about by the Westminster government, and the enactment of these laws depended on Stormont *not* reconvening before October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019. This is an irony not lost on many of the campaigners fighting for law repeal and in previous times, the reopening of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Since then, the law has not been fully implemented. There have been a number of challenges both within Stormont and from church groups. In June 2020, the Assembly passed a Democratic Unionist Party (‘DUP’) motion to reject the regulations. Paul Givan, a DUP assembly member, (currently First Minister), is reported by the BBC to have said that the British Government had treated Northern Ireland “with contempt”. The Assembly vote has no effect on the law, however. (Source <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/abortion-law-in-northern-ireland/>) The Secretary of State Brandon Lewis will compel Stormont to enact the laws this summer <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2021/365/>. A recent bill proposed by Paul Givan to the Stormont Health Committee, to limit the new legislation on abortion brought a number of abstentions, “on grounds of conscience” notably from the SDLP and Sinn Fein. October 21<sup>st</sup> 2021

<sup>xlv</sup> P48. Hull, D (May 2020) *How can our culture sector ever recover from COVID 19?* Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe)

<sup>xlvi</sup> P48.Ramsey and Waterhouse quoted Durrer, V; & McCall-Magan, K. (2017). *Cultural Policy making and research on the island of Ireland*. Cultural Trends Journal, 26(3) pp 189 -195

<sup>xlvii</sup> P50. Leeney, C; (2010); *Irish Women Playwrights 1900–1939: Gender and Violence*. Quoted in Caulfield, 2011 ‘*Inseparable and no longer subsequent*’: *The relocation and representation of women in Irish theatre practices*. Theatre Research International, 36(3), p 276–277.

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## Endnotes

<sup>xlviii</sup> P50. Theatre is a hierarchical institution, often fostering what Tanya Dean and others cite as “The Myth of the Charismatic Leader”. (*Creating Safer Spaces in the Theatre and Performing Arts Sector Event Report, Theatre NI 2018*). This in turn can lead to a culture in which the abusive behaviour, highlighted in campaigns such as ‘#MeToo’, initiated by Tarana Burke, can all too easily thrive. See also The Guardian which although specifically referring to TV and film is applicable to theatre in terms of a vulnerable freelance workforce often forced into compliancy and silence. See Kale, S; Gentleman A, Osborne, L: (27<sup>th</sup> May 2021) The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/may/27/after-noel-clerke-can-the-uk-film-and-tv-industry-bring-an-end-to-on-set-bullying?>

<sup>xlix</sup> P50. Tipton, G. Irish Times (July 11<sup>th</sup> 2020) *Theatre was broken before Covid – now there’s no going back- Why would theatre makers want to return to the ‘old normal’ of overwork and underpay?*

<sup>l</sup> P50. a) Tsioulakis, I & Fitzgibbon, A: (2020) ‘Performing Artists in the age of COVID 19: A moment of urgent action and potential change’. <http://qpol.qub.ac.uk/performing-artists-in-the-age-of-covid-19> 09 Apr 2020, Qpol. b) Lillington K: *Irish artists need to put a stop to the firehose of ‘free’* Irish Times, June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020. c) Thompson, T. *The real ‘crown jewels’ of the arts? An unprotected freelance workforce*. Guardian 22 July 2020.

<sup>li</sup> P50. The unique vulnerability of the freelancer feeds into a wider debate and scholarship around “Passionate work” and enshrined inequalities within the Arts and Cultural Sectors. See: McRobbie, A (2016) *Be Creative* Polity Press; Brook, O: O’Brien, D: Taylor, M. (2020) *Culture is Bad for You: Inequality in the cultural and creative industries* (Manchester University Press).

<sup>lii</sup> P50. a) Arts Council of Northern Ireland Website: “Arts Council opens emergency programme for artists and performers” 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020. <http://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-council-opens-emergency-programme-for-artists-and-performers> b) Arts Council of Northern Ireland Website “Arts Council Chief Executive gives Covid-19 update to Communities Committee, Stormont” 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020 <http://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-council-chief-executive-gives-covid-19-update-to-communities-committee> The Arts Council scheme reopened several times during 2020, and on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the UK Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden, announced a £1.57bn emergency support package to help protect the future of theatres, galleries and museums. It is estimated Northern Ireland would receive £33 million, but there were long delays in distributing the money. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-53304721>

<sup>liii</sup> P51. The Bread and Butter fund rose out of a Facebook Page, *NI Freelancers surviving Corona* which was formed late March 2020 as a support group for those affected by the loss of work and income due to the pandemic restrictions. It is also a perfect example of having to raise a profile before funding bodies see the need for help.

<sup>liv</sup> P51. Gardner, L: *We need a system that values everyone’s work – and pays fairly*. (The Stage, July 2020). It is also worth pointing out that many of the grassroots campaigns in Northern Ireland’s theatre sector were being initiated by freelance female theatre practitioners.

<sup>lv</sup> P51. Research is also ongoing into the effect of the pandemic on Freelancers within the UK - the team is led by Dr. Holly Maples, Principle Investigator, East 15 School of Acting (University of Essex) with the participation of many academics and institutions across the UK, including Dr. Ali FitzGibbon, Co-investigator, Queen’s University Belfast and Dr. Kurt Taroff, Co-investigator, Queen’s University Belfast. <https://freelancersinthedark.com>

<sup>lvi</sup> P51. Tinderbox and Replay were amongst the first with other companies following suit. See also: *BBC and the Lyric Theatre produce new theatrical isolation dramas with top Northern Ireland talent* ACNI website 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

<sup>lvii</sup> P51. This has opened up new challenges in terms of payment, royalties and contracts. Initially the repeated plays broadcast by the National Theatre were being down without payment to the contributing artists See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-52572253>

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## Endnotes

<sup>lviii</sup> P51. Big Telly, in particular, were pioneers of Zoom productions and collaboration with other companies such as Oxford based Creation Theatre. It should be noted that much of the Lyric Theatre's output of recorded plays have been written by female playwrights over the past year. Whilst this is welcome, it needs to be carried forward in terms of main stage productions when the theatres re-open.

<sup>lix</sup> P52. Falvey, D: "Yes we did!" *Irish Theatre's gender equality revolution*. Irish Times, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

<sup>lx</sup>P52. Dr Ciara L. Murphy - supported by Dr Ciara O'Dowd, Dr Brenda Donohue, and Sarah Durcan (November 2020) *5 Years On: Gender in Irish Theatre - An Interim View*

<sup>lxi</sup>P53. For example theatre companies, freelancers, performers' trade unions such as Equity Arts Council of NI and Theatre and Dance Ni Ulster University and QUB. There is also ongoing research by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland into bullying and harassment within the Theatre sector. There has also been a very recent report published addressing bullying, harassment and abuse within the Republic of Ireland's theatre sector: Murphy, C L; Donohoe B; Conall O'Duibhir with support from Dr Peter Campbell and Olwen Dawe (Oct 2021) *Speak up: A call for change towards creating a safe and respectful working environment for the arts*. Commissioned by the Irish Theatre Institute.  
[https://www.irishtheatreinstitute.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ITI-Speak-Up-A-Call-for-Change-Report-Oct2021\\_Final\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.irishtheatreinstitute.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ITI-Speak-Up-A-Call-for-Change-Report-Oct2021_Final_WEB.pdf)

<sup>lxii</sup> P53. Another excellent initiative is **NEROPA** - a gender-neutral system devised for play and film script casting by Belinde Ruth Stieve. Following a presentation in London in January 2018, organised by the Equity Women's Committee, I contacted Lorne Boswell (then organiser at Equity's Scotland and Northern Ireland Office) to see if we could host a presentation in Belfast. Through a cross border initiative organised between Karan O' Loughlin Irish Equity and Lorne, Marlen Curran and Adam Adnyana of Equity, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Belinde presented her work in Dublin and Belfast in October 2018. Since April 2019, **Northern Ireland Screen** require that the **NEROPA** system is applied to film projects seeking funding via the organisation. <https://neropa.stieve.com/en/neropa-start>

<sup>lxiii</sup> p53. Within the NI context, weaker employment laws and equality protections leave freelancers particularly vulnerable. (Source "Creating Safer Spaces in the Theatre and Performing Arts Sector" Event Report, Theatre NI 2018).

<sup>lxiv</sup> P53. **a)** The Department for Communities' Culture Arts and Heritage Recovery Taskforce has only one place on the taskforce reserved for a freelance representative, a network support for freelancers is much needed. <http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/culture-arts-and-heritage-recovery-taskforce>  
**b)** Deirdre Hargey, MLA, announced that a Creative Individuals Recovery Fund for freelancers was opening for applications from midday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021 until 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021; a welcome addition to measures brought in to mitigate the economic effects of the COVID pandemic. <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/hargey-launches-ps5m-fund-retain-skills-creative-sector>

<sup>lxvi</sup> P54. Intertwined with this is the need to recalibrate the relationship between freelancers and theatre institutions be they companies or funding bodies. Space does not allow me to elaborate too much but it includes thinking about the blurring of lines between formal and informal (or professional and friendship) in a small industry such as theatre in Northern Ireland. One example: a) safeguarding professional behaviour at all times – including "audition etiquette" (Actors being informed when they haven't got the job, not finding out via Social media when it has been cast). b) casting in "safe spaces" - being aware of the brief of the job and where one is being auditioned. c) In terms of artists' development schemes with respect to older artists: "New/Emerging" should not always equate with "Under twenty-five". Equally, a long CV indicating experience does not equate to financial stability or a lack of interest in developing new skills. Recently, the Arts Council published a report with recommendations regarding freelancers it is to be welcomed in opening the conversation. Anabel Jackson Associated Ltd (March 2021) *Freelance Practitioner Research Report: Development, creative and production needs of freelance artists in Northern Ireland's theatre and dance sectors*. Published by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

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## Endnotes

<sup>lxvii</sup> P54. Dean, D (2008) *Age, Gender and Performer Employment in Europe: Report on research for the International Federation of Actor's (FIA) project 'Changing gender portrayal: promoting employment opportunities for women in the performing arts'* The Restoration of the monarchy 360 years ago brought women to British (and by extension, Irish), stages, after millennia of male dominance.

<sup>lxviii</sup> P54. In a seven-minute extract from "Thinking Allowed"; a long running American independent Public Television series hosted by Jeffrey Mishlove, Dr Gerda Lerner expounds on the creation of the Patriarchy and why women did not even realise that they were oppressed or subjugated, unlike other subjugated groups of people. "...Greek philosophy, Greek science and the Bible are the mainstays of the idea system on which western civilization is founded and which pretend or assert that they explain the world to us, right? These systems all took the subordination of women for granted (be)cause at the time they were created, that subordination had already been completed." [https://youtu.be/R\\_PJwMpAgtQ](https://youtu.be/R_PJwMpAgtQ). The phrase 'Patriarchal thinking living "rent free" in our heads' seems apt – but as far as I can ascertain, I cannot attribute the phrase to a single source. It has many mothers.

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The major source and template for our own survey was **Donohue, B. et al.** (2016) “*Gender Counts*”: *An Analysis of Gender in Irish Theatre*. [online] Waking the Feminists, Dublin.

It includes an extensive bibliography.

Also: **Murphy, CL.** (2020) *5 Years On: Gender in Irish Theatre - An Interim View*.

Both publications and other valuable research resources, can be accessed here:

<http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/research>

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## Appendix 1:

Tables showing breakdown of Annual Funding Programme Lottery & Exchequer funding per annum

| Venue/ Company | 2018/19 Exchequer    | 2018/19 Lottery    | 2018/19 Exchequer and lottery combined |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|--|
| Lyric          | £603,224.00          | £412,084.00        | £1,015,308.00                          |
| Prime Cut      | £85,433.00           | £57,500.00         | £142,933.00                            |
| Big Telly      | £82,290.00           | £56,196.00         | £138,486.00                            |
| Replay         | £86,479.00           | £49,845.00         | £136,324.00                            |
| Cahoots        | £65,593.00           | £46,715.00         | £112,308.00                            |
| Tinderbox      | £67,210.00           | £41,600.00         | £108,810.00                            |
| Aisling Ghear  | £50,358.00           | £12,460.00         | £62,818.00                             |
| Kabosh         | £36,708.00           | £18,000.00         | £54,708.00                             |
| <b>Totals</b>  | <b>£1,077,295.00</b> | <b>£694,400.00</b> | <b>£1,771,695.00</b>                   |

| Venue/Company | 2017/18 Exchequer                               | 2017/18 Lottery                      | 2017/18 Exchequer and Lottery combined |
|---------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Lyric         | £276,981.00 + £299,500.00<br><b>£576,481.00</b> | £199,750.00 x2<br><b>£399,500.00</b> | £975,981.00                            |
| Prime Cut     | £45,200.00 + £48,875.00<br><b>£94,075.00</b>    | £28,750.00 x2<br><b>£57,500.00</b>   | £151,575.00                            |
| Big Telly     | £43,537.00 + £47,077.00<br><b>£90,614.00</b>    | £28,098.00 x2<br><b>£56,196.00</b>   | £146,810.00                            |
| Replay        | £45,754.00 + £49,473.00<br><b>£95,227.00</b>    | £24,923.00 x2<br><b>£49,846.00</b>   | £145,073.00                            |
| Cahoots       | £34,703.00 + £37,525.00<br><b>£72,228.00</b>    | £23,358.00 x2<br><b>£46,716.00</b>   | £118,944.00                            |
| Tinderbox     | £35,559.00 + £38,450.00<br><b>£74,009.00</b>    | £20,800.00 x 2<br><b>£41,600.00</b>  | £115,609.00                            |
| Aisling Ghear | £28,649.00 + £30,978.00<br><b>£59,627.00</b>    | £7,637.00 x2<br><b>£15,274.00</b>    | £74,910.00                             |
| Kabosh        | £21,000.00 + £19,420.00<br><b>£40,420.00</b>    | £9,000.00 x2<br><b>£18,000.00</b>    | £58,420.00                             |
| <b>Totals</b> | <b>£1,102,681.00</b>                            | <b>£684,632.00</b>                   | <b>£1,787,313.00</b>                   |

## Appendix 1:

Tables showing breakdown of Annual Funding Programme Lottery & Exchequer funding per annum

| Venue/Company | 2016/17 Exchequer    | 2016/17 Lottery    | 2017/18 Exchequer and Lottery combined |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------------|--|
| The Lyric     | £599,000.00          | £369,500.00        | £968,500.00                            |
| Prime Cut     | £97,749.00           | £57,500.00         | £155,249.00                            |
| Big Telly     | £94,154.00           | £56,196.00         | £150,350.00                            |
| Replay        | £98,946.00           | £49,845.00         | £148,791.00                            |
| Cahoots       | £75,049.00           | £46,715.00         | £121,764.00                            |
| Tinderbox     | £76,900.00           | £41,600.00         | £118,500.00                            |
| Aisling Ghear | £61,956.00           | £15,273.00         | £77,229.00                             |
| Kabosh        | £42,000.00           | £18,000.00         | £60,000.00                             |
| <b>Totals</b> | <b>£1,145,754.00</b> | <b>£654,629.00</b> | <b>£1,800,383.00</b>                   |

Prior to 2016 – only one total is given and these tally with the 2016/17 figures.

| Venue/Company | 2015/16              |
|---------------|----------------------|
| The Lyric     | £968,500.00          |
| Prime Cut     | £155,249.00          |
| Big Telly     | £150,350.00          |
| Replay        | £148,791.00          |
| Cahoots       | £121,764.00          |
| Tinderbox     | £118,500.00          |
| Aisling Ghear | £377, 229.00         |
| Kabosh        | £60,000.00           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>£1,800,383.00</b> |

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## Appendix 1:

Tables showing breakdown of Annual Funding Programme Lottery & Exchequer funding per annum  
Again, only one total was given on the ACNI pdf. The order of funding is according to totals awarded.

| Venue/Company | 2014/2015            |
|---------------|----------------------|
| The Lyric     | £1,018,500.00        |
| Tinderbox     | £213,400.00          |
| Prime Cut     | £155,249.00          |
| Big Telly     | £150,350.00          |
| Replay        | £148,791.00          |
| Cahoots       | £121,764.00          |
| Kabosh        | £107,454.00          |
| Aisling Ghear | £77,229.00           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>£1,992,737.00</b> |

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