

TAODS Technical Report 2019–2020

Technically, rather ironically, the year up until march had been, objectively, an incredible success. As a technical team and as a venue we found new ways to present work, as well as refining and improving upon the ways we have been doing so for a long time.

Nowhere was this more evident than across the three TAODS productions staged this year. Beginning with the design, build and paint of Imaginary, not to mention the outlandish costumes created – this was a huge undertaking. We particularly saw the lighting team reap the benefits of the (relatively) new lighting desk, as a few of them grew more comfortable with it and its capabilities, allowing for such things as the mapped light boxes all over the set, leading to the team to win a NODA award.

Following up from that we were able to completely transform the theatre space for Grimm tales, with a whole new stage being built in the middle of the stalls, and seats being moved over the pit, and along each wall, to transform the auditorium into an in the round space, a special mention to those involved in building the stage and then putting in the infrastructure to be able to light it, including repurposing the fairy lights in place from a certain wedding. Presenting this close to the audience also brought the figurative spotlight onto the props, puppets and costumes – showcasing our inventive approach and attention to detail.

Finally, in February for Kitchen Sink (which would end up being our last TAODS production for a so far indefinite amount of time) we once again redefined the performance space, moving the back wall forward, and sprawling the set, and the performance, over the apron, and right into the audience's laps. This was a particular triumph of set design and construction, creating a singular space that sprawled over multiple levels and yet remained as one.

It's also worth mentioning that across the three productions we had 3 different stage managers, 3 different props teams and both plays featured newcomers to the sound team, both of whom were on stage at some point in the previous year, as was our stage manager for Kitchen Sink.

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If there's anything to carry forward from the last year, it's that attitude of adaptability and enthusiasm, from both the usual suspects and those who are willing to put their hand to something out of their usual range, possibly for the first time.

Unfortunately, that enthusiasm didn't necessarily carry itself over to our other bookings, we came very close to being unable to staff an evening with the poet laureate, and in many cases it was either very last-minute offers or reluctantly long hours from a select handful of volunteers. And although most of the visiting productions went off without a hitch, with *ladies that bus*, and the straw bale building conference (the correct name for which eludes me completely) being particularly happy with their experience, there have been times that we were not completely able to provide a level of support we would normally be satisfied with.

This has led the Exec committee to approve a new pricing structure which allows for the costs of hiring in tech staff where necessary. However, if there's anything we'd like to push for next year, it's members using these visiting shows as a way of helping out in a part of the Hippodrome they wouldn't usually have the opportunity to.

Since we've been unable to welcome audiences into the theatre, we've taken every opportunity to ensure that when they do finally return, that it's an even better theatre than before. This ranges from the big and obvious – the front of house bar being removed and the platform at the rear of the circle being dismantled, both of which have made the circle feel like a much more open space to the smaller, unnoticed changes that make our lives much easier. First and foremost: both the wardrobe team and the props team have spent countless hours reorganising recategorizing, and completely restructuring the way both props and costumes are stored, this has also involved improvements to both storage spaces, with new lighting in the props store, and benches in the small dressing room. Elsewhere across the theatre we've replaced the front of house lights with smaller, brighter, more versatile

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fixtures; we've replaced and updated the dimmers, moving them out of the dressing rooms and giving us more flexibility; made replacements for the amps, to allow us to get the most out of our speaker system; and we've renewed large portions of the electrical wiring through the theatre. All of this allows us to open safely and more efficiently, when we do finally open.

Although these changes aren't likely to be noticed by most people, they do help improve the safety and, once again, versatility of the space, opening up possibilities for ourselves, and, in some cases, mitigating flood damage.