

# PMF NEWSLETTER

## NOVEMBER 2019

**Welcome to our November Newsletter. In this issue...**

- We welcome Ollie Brown to the PMF Committee.
- Ollie talks about the launch of our Mentoring Scheme.
- Suzy Somerville reports on the Support Hub Network revamp.
- The New Vic Theatre Staffordshire is our featured Support Hub Network venue.
- David Evans reports on a Black T-shirt Barbecue and a recent trip to Lithuania.
- We report on the Offstage Conference.
- The video of the Edinburgh Forum on Fringe Theatre is available.
- Pip Robinson and Mike Ager at our regular November Social.
- There are still some roles vacant on the PMF Committee.

**THANKS, AS ALWAYS, TO OUR SUPPORTERS**



**PMF IN ASSOCIATION WITH**



## Ollie Brown joins the PMF Committee

Ollie is currently the Head of Production and Technical for Hull Truck Theatre, leading the production and building teams whilst also Production Managing and undertaking creative roles on Hull Truck productions.

Before joining Hull Truck he worked extensively within the industry as a freelance Production Manager and a Lighting Designer. He has also worked as a resident technician within some of the UK's most respected theatres.



We are delighted that Ollie is going to be responsible for our Mentoring Schemes.

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## Mentoring

October 27th was #NationalMentoringDay and to celebrate we launched the new PMF Mentoring Scheme!

The scheme is hoping to support and develop Production Managers at any point in their career, whether currently training, looking to make the move into Production Management, or already working in Production Management but wanting to develop and reflect on their own practices.



Our scheme will connect you with experienced Production Managers to meet and discuss careers, problems and successes.

We had a fantastic launch at the end of October with brilliant engagement across social media and through a launch email. We have already been encouraged by a number of sign ups as both mentors and mentees! So if you are interested in supporting as a mentor you can find out more [here](#). Or if you could benefit from having a mentor to further your career then please sign up [here](#).

Givemy Masso has written an article about the scheme for 'The Stage'. You can access it [here](#).

For any more information on the scheme you can always get in touch with the committee on [info@productionmanagersforum.org](mailto:info@productionmanagersforum.org)

**Stop Press.** The scheme is proving to be one of the most popular things the PMF has done. We are still accepting applications from Mentors and Mentees, but Mentees will be put on a waiting list.

## Suzy Somerville has overseen the relaunch of the Support Hub Network and Suppliers Directory



Since the last newsletter our exciting new web page has launched.

The PMF identified the need to support Production and Technical Managers whilst working on tour and away from base and has set up the Support Hub Network.

This is a group of (currently 24) venues/freelancers who are happy to be contacted by anyone working in their area for local knowledge of suppliers, venues, council contacts or even recommendations for a good pub! The PMF encourages its Support Hubs to host Socials and Forums. If you are interested in this get in touch and the PMF can help support the event.

We have added to our Support Hub map a Suppliers Directory. So far we have had 6 companies contact the PMF to be added to the directory, we are keen for lots more! We aim to compile an extensive list of suppliers and services to be a go-to-resource for Production Managers, but we need your help! If you use a local supplier or contractor send us their details [using this form](#). If the Supplier is recommended by a PMF member their listing is free!

For more details and to sign up as either a Support Hub or a Supplier head to the [Support section of our website!](#)

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### Featured Support Hub: New Vic Theatre, Staffordshire



The New Vic was the first purpose built in-the-round theatre in Europe. It opened in 1986 and has a loyal workforce and audience base. The New Vic predominately presents its own work (7-9 productions a year) with a small additional programme of weekly touring shows and one-night concerts.

For more info please visit the theatre's [website](#)



The New Vic is lucky enough to have its own full-time production and technical teams. This includes a stage management team of 5, a technical team of 5, a workshop team of 5, a costume team of 6 as well as close support from the maintenance team. The New Vic shows are rehearsed, built and made on site.

Many of the shows make use of Lis Evans, the Resident Designer, as well as Laura Willsted, the Head of Workshops, designing one or two shows a year. James Earls-Davis, the Head of the Technical Department, Sound Designs most of the shows, with Alex Day designing one annually and co-designing the Christmas show. Danni Beattie, the Chief Electrician, also Lighting Designs the majority of the shows. All in-house shows are production managed by Suzy Somerville, the Head of Production.

The New Vic has two performance spaces: The Round which seats 600 and the studio space, licensed to a capacity of 90.

### **What makes it special?**

It is one of the few in-the-round venues in the UK. This creates a more democratic experience for the audience and also creates challenges for design and production teams. The New Vic's work often tours and in-the-round productions then need to evolve into end-on productions. The New Vic is very proud to have taken *Around The World in 80 Days* over to New York and Florida early this year.

### **As a SHN member what area is the New Vic ideal to assist with?**

The workshop and costume teams have decades of production experience between them and are used to producing objects to be seen close up and from all sides: so have extensive making knowledge. There is a large props and furniture store which can also be helpful.



If you would like to be the **featured Support Hub** in the next newsletter please get in touch.

Don't forget to join up to the [PMF's closed Facebook group](#) to be able to talk to other members and share your experiences and knowledge.

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## David Evans, PMF chair, gets soaked at a barbecue

The Black T-Shirt BBQ went ahead on October 4<sup>th</sup> despite the extremely inclement weather. Hosted at Cardiff Theatrical Services' (CTS) Cardiff site and co-hosted by the PMF, National Theatre Wales and ABTT Cymru, a number of brave souls put rain prejudice aside and gathered around a pair of steaming BBQs. To be fair the rain retreated and the sun did make a guest appearance prior to being vanquished by the early autumn night.



People from the hosting organisations, plus Welsh National Opera, Tiger Bay Crew, various freelancers including artist Kyle Legall all appeared and most of them pointed out that October is not prime BBQ weather - they may be right but it was a great evening and will certainly be repeated in Cardiff, probably in May or June.

All PMF members are encouraged to hold their own Black T-shirt BBQ at any time of the year. Do send photos if you do - we forgot.

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## Offstage Conference

Ollie headed over to this year's UK Theatre Offstage conference in Birmingham to report back to the PMF.

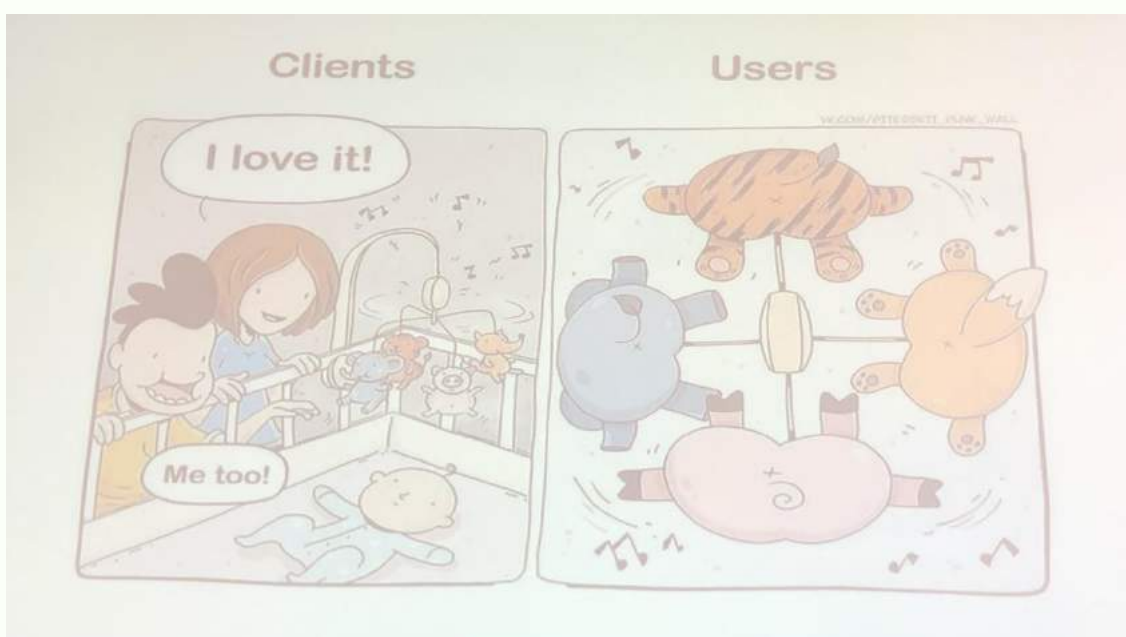
The logo for the Off Stage 2019 conference. The words "Off Stage" are in a blue, sans-serif font, and "2019" is in a white, bold, sans-serif font inside a blue rounded rectangle.

The conference, hosted by Phillip Brown of UK Theatre, focused on three subject areas of Risk, Crisis and Wellbeing. All the seminars and workshops focused on one of these areas. I chose, this time, to focus on the risk elements.

The conference opened with a welcome from UK Theatre President and CEO of the host venue of Birmingham Hippodrome, Fiona Allen, and Head of Risk and Technical for UK Theatre, Phillip Brown. Following the welcome, Blue Lemon, a software based Health and Safety management app, provided a quick demo of their software, which is well worth a look. We also discussed a new initiative around accident reporting.

Utilising Blue Lemon's software, all UK Theatre and ABTT members will be given free access to the accident and incident reporting module. This intuitive software provides a quick and simple method of recording and reporting to replace the accident books. Using this software will also give UK Theatre and ABTT completely anonymised information of accidents, incidents and near misses, to give a whole industry view. They will be given information of total accidents and incidents - no identifying information. I am sure more will follow regarding this from both organisations.

Following this, the delegates split up into the various workshops and seminars. As I said, I focused on Risk, attending three workshops. Firstly Risk Assessment Masterclass. This was a panel discussion around how we make risk assessment fit for purpose but also accessible. Zoe Davies started by discussing how to approach a risk assessment as a planning tool, and not just a form to fill out. Zoe brought with her the best PowerPoint slide by far!



Zoe's argument was to take the pain and labour out of completing risk assessments, change the wording and make it accessible! Not everyone works in risk x severity, asking people what control measures are in place is like talking another language. Following Zoe there were presentations from legal and insurance representatives, and the HSE. The key thing to remember is to make them accessible, make them engaging and make them applicable!

I also attended the best manual handling training that I've been to! Titled Adapt to Manual Handling, this looked at how sometimes traditional manual handling training could be quite tricky in the world of theatre, and how we maybe don't follow all the rules of manual handling all the time because we aren't a bunch of robots! Instead we should consider how we condition our bodies, and how our bodies adapt to the strains and tasks we put on ourselves. You must always look at the personal risk factors. An awkward position for me, may well be different for you. Consider your working day. How active are you really? Condition your body regularly to enable effective manual handling. Adam Hamilton was an effective and engaging speaker, who had a room of 25 Technical Directors, Production Managers and Ops Managers stand for an hour and half without a complaint!

The conference was engaging and informative. Although very much directed toward venue-based production staff, there would have been lots for freelance staff to gain too. Looking forward to Offstage 2020!

## Edinburgh Forum

In August the PMF hosted its first Forum outside London. Chaired by Ruari Cormack, and with Chris Buffham and Fi Fraser on the panel, it focussed on The Fringe



The video of this forum is now available [here](#). Many thanks to: Flints for their support. Ruari for chairing. Chris and Fi for being on the panel. And to Kelman and Gemma Greig-Kicks at neon8 for producing the video.

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## SHN Updates

A big hello to our new Support Hub members: Ben Wills at the Mercury Colchester and Martin Radmall at Brilliant Stages in Yorkshire.

And we would like to highlight our newly added recommended suppliers:

- Theme-X in Staffordshire, specialising in prop making and CNC Router Cutting and Laser Cutting
- Stage Electrics, nationwide, providing Lighting, Sound, Staging, Trussing, Rigging, Stage Curtains and Stage Management Systems for venues
- dBS Solutions in Warrington, specialising in Sound and Lighting Hire

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## Pip Robinson and Mike Ager ran our Autumn Social in Soho

Friday the 8th November saw our annual Autumn Social held at the Spice of Life pub, Soho. Now in its third year, this social has been active since we relaunched the PMF and has become a highlight of our calendar.

The Social is an opportunity for Production and Technical professionals to come together over a drink and catch up.





Most of us in the industry will rarely work with fellow Production Managers and it can become an isolating role, especially during busy periods. Our Socials aim to bring friends and colleagues together to relax, catch up, and share stories of their recent projects. They are open to anyone working technically in Theatre and Live Events. Last week we welcomed a wonderful mix of lighting, automation, stage management and draughting professionals. We also had several new suppliers attend who used the opportunity to network with potential new clients.

One member of PRG who attended wrote "Just got back from the latest PM Forum and have to say it was one of the best evenings I've had for ages. I met loads of new people, old friends and absolute legends of the industry. If you've not been to a social or are thinking of joining the Forum, DO IT! These people are lovely, supportive and so passionate about our industry."

All the suppliers that attended will be signing up to our Support Hub Network as registered suppliers, which allows our members to locate resources across the UK, helping professionals working in unfamiliar locations.

This year the Social was very well attended, with a mix of Freelance and venue-based Production Managers, many of whom signed up to our new Mentoring scheme. There was lively debate and energetic discussion over a variety of topics, a few of which we're interested in developing into topics for our 2020 Forums.

All in all, a great evening was had by all and we're very much looking forward to the next Social at next year's ABTT Theatre Show in the summer.



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## PMF Committee Vacancies

Would you consider joining the PMF Committee to help us support and promote Production Management?

All committee members play a part in the general running and development of the PMF, but each of us also has a specific role.

We are mainly looking for members of the Production Management profession to take on responsibility for:

### Media Content.

To be responsible for arranging and managing the filming, editing, publishing and archiving of the videos of our Forums. This would preferably be someone with AV related experience or technical competency in filming, sound recording and editing.

### Forum Support

This will preferably be someone based in the Midlands or further North who will work with our established team on all aspects of the promotion and delivery of our Forum events.

### Fundraising and Sponsorship.

This need not be a Production Manager, but we would like to find someone with the right experience and a passion for Live Events to work with us on our short and long-term fundraising. The PMF depends on sponsorship and donations from the industry to enable us to provide support and to deliver our UK-wide events and projects at no cost to our members.

These roles are voluntary positions and will only require a small amount of time per month. If you are interested, or know someone who might be, please contact us via [info@productionmanagersforum.org](mailto:info@productionmanagersforum.org)

More information about the roles can be found [here](#).

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## THE PMF NEEDS YOU!

We are keen to know what our members want from the PMF and how best for us to support our members.

Keep an eye on your inboxes for a member survey coming around.

Please take 5 minutes to complete the survey so we can make the most out of the PMF.

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## Finally, David Evans, Chair of the PMF, reports on a recent trip to Lithuania

I have just returned from Lithuania where I was attending the Vinius International Theatre Festival, appropriately a celebration of all things Lithuanian and theatrical that stretches over a week and involves conferences, multiple shows and many networking opportunities. An entertaining and very interesting event that I enjoyed greatly. I am trying to work out how I can secure an invitation for a return visit.



My presence there was as a representative of National Theatre Wales, and I gave a talk about our work and some of the more absurd things that we have done, including shows on the side of mountains, shows on trains, shows in aircraft hangers and closing down central Cardiff when 125,000 people turned up for a show. All of which generated a gratifying amount of interest.

A large part of such festivals is watching shows. On this occasion the six shows that I saw were variously fascinating, impressive, entertaining and interesting. Unusually I was not bored though one did make me quite indignant. The last show that I saw was quite an experience and surprising in some quite unexpected ways.

*Last night there was a performance of A MAN FROM PODOLSK directed by Oskaras Koršunovas, a director much admired in Lithuania and beyond. Understandably so as his work is impressive. The venue could only house 80 people, so it felt a bit clandestine as we huddled in front of a nondescript building sheltering from the rain awaiting permission to enter. We noticed a number of black vehicles parked in the street and a certain amount of rushing about by tall fit-looking people: not the usual demographic for a theatre audience. It turned out that the President of Lithuania had decided to attend the performance and they were his security detail. The President was somehow spirited into the venue - a narrow room with 40 seats on either side. He was in place when we eventually shuffled in, but how he got there was unclear.*

*I am sitting with the international delegation on one side, the President and his wife on the other; discretely hidden in the shadows are security, with those curly earpieces. At the far end of the room are two members of the public sitting on a flight-case. It is obvious who has taken their seats. Very loud industrial music is thumping and one actor is prowling the room, vulpine and maniacal. To say that this was surreal would be an understatement. The play started with the actor shouting at us, and most particularly at the President, in English (I thought that was very considerate as the play was performed in Lithuanian) and he points out that we will all be safe as the room is crawling with security.*

*The play was an intense piece about interrogation, possibly in the former soviet block, possibly in modern day Russia, it is not specific, but it is claustrophobic and upsetting. Seated one person away from me is an elderly woman who has been treated with great reverence by everyone - it appears that she is a critic who is much loved and admired and has always been kind and generous to the beleaguered arts community. Her mobile goes off, and it is very loud, very very loud. She initially tries to cover it with her bag which just makes it more obvious. The volume is so significant that the play stops, the actors are looking at her, the audience have moved from uncomfortable to giggling, at which point the actor, who moments before had been aggressively shouting at the detainee, cracks the most beatific smile, and walks over to her (only a matter of a couple of metres) and helps her find her phone and turn it off. All the other actors smile reassuringly, there is the most incongruous wave of affection through the room, there is no embarrassment. Then, after a beat, the show begins again.*

It was a strange night.

The following day I hid from the torrential rain in an empty restaurant, where yet again, as if by magic, the president and his retinue suddenly appeared.

