

Fog everywhere

A Camden People's Theatre production, made by and with young people





Arts Council England invited Brian Logan, the Artistic Director for Camden People's Theatre (CPT), to compile and narrate this photo-essay of **Fog Everywhere**.

Fog Everywhere was a theatre show produced by CPT in 2017, in collaboration with teenage students at Westminster Kingsway College in Kings Cross, and with the Environmental Research Group at King's College, London. This case study talks through the project. It is narrated by Brian but also partly told through quotes from the young people who made up the cast and were the lead creators of the show. It also includes quotes from the show's academic partner and local councillors.

Fog Everywhere demonstrates how arts organisations can co-create impactful cultural experiences with and for children and young people, with their voices, concerns and passion at the centre of the process.



Fog Everywhere was presented at CPT in Oct/Nov 2017 as part of our 'Shoot the Breeze' festival of eco-themed theatre and performance.

The show was created in response to a growing awareness of the damaging effects of London air pollution on the city's children and young people. There was increasing evidence that poor air quality affected children in a range of ways, from the development of their lungs, to their mental health and cognitive abilities, and beyond. We at CPT felt that the voices of children and young people were not being heard in this conversation – and that attention needed to be paid to this crisis-in-waiting in the lives of young Londoners.

In 2017, we went to Westminster Kingsway students to begin to work with them on what would become **Fog Everywhere**.

Bleak House, by Charles Dickens (1853)

“Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green meadows. Fog down the river, where it rolls among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great and dirty city. Fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships.

Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

Smoke lowering down from the chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun... ”



Phoebe Fairchild, cast member

“I was like, ‘that sounds cool’, but I didn’t know anything about it. I feel like I was one of the people who actually cared a bit more about pollution, because I’m asthmatic, and was aware how bad it is. I remember when you first came, we did the exercise with balloons about who had bad lungs. I was like: *I’ve got bad lungs!*

But I was also like: ‘no one cares, young people don’t care.’ **Who’s going to want to watch a show about air pollution? And is the show going to be like a massive *fact thing*?** Which it wasn’t, but I was scared it was going to be like loads of information.”



Musical director Conrad Murray and myself conducted workshops with the young company at Westminster Kingsway college throughout 2017. We encountered some interest in the subject of our show, and some indifference to it. At the start of the process, the students also wondered: if they did make a show with us about air quality, who would want to listen to what they had to say?

Several also felt that, compared to racism or social justice (as they understood it), the question of air quality was of lesser importance in their lives. We fed that resistance into our devising process, and dramatised the very debates we were having in the rehearsal room – about pollution versus racism, powerlessness versus agency, idealism versus cynicism.

Through a series of workshops exploring London, air quality, the iconography of the famous 'London fog', and the young company's hopes and dreams for their futures, a patchwork 'sketch theatre' show emerged. It told the story of a group of young Londoners, living, laughing and loving their city – while the air that swirls around them gets ever more noxious...



Tobi-King Bakare, cast member

“If you approached me when I was 17 and gave me a straight-up play about air pollution – ‘here’s the script, this is your character...’ – I don’t think I would have done the research and cared about it. Certainly not as much as if you asked me, ‘what’s your opinion on this? Let’s workshop that. Why do you think you feel that way?’

So I feel like the way we made *Fog* was a great medium, for young people especially – because at that age, we’re just finding ourselves. We’re just exploring and having fun. That was what made *Fog* interesting to me. I would go home with these thoughts, **I’d speak to my friends about it. And not realise that I was getting invested in the conversation, and forming an opinion of my own.**

In terms of those social justice arguments we had in the room, I now feel like *Fog* was the first trigger for me to think deeply about those things. Now I’m someone who’s much more active around social justice than I was back then.

But it was *Fog* that triggered me to start thinking.”



Andrew Grieve, air quality analyst, Environmental Research Group,
Imperial College (formerly of King's College)

“One thing that was particularly distinctive about *Fog Everywhere* was the use of theatre, specifically, as the means of expression. In the air quality landscape, that was very unusual, and quite ground-breaking. Thinking about art and air quality, you're usually looking at outdoor installations, at putting something in the public realm, or an exhibition in a gallery. I haven't seen any other air quality-specific theatre productions.

The other striking thing was that, in all my years of working in the field of air quality – and that's a long time – this was the only time I've worked just with teenagers. I can't talk to the rest of the environmental landscape, but when it comes to air quality, teenagers don't really get a look-in. If you look at newspaper articles and events around air pollution, they'll talk about vulnerable groups, but they'll never really talk about teenagers. So this was such a powerful project, because in a landscape that had been devoid of those voices, it brought teenage voices to the fore.”



Pele Green, cast member

“I think the way we approached it, you encouraged us to draw from our own experiences. I remember I did this improv about the London Underground, how ‘I love the smell of the Tube’. And then I looked into it and was like: wow, all that smell and the black mist and why the atmosphere is like that down there – it’s something I wouldn’t have thought about unless I did this. The process did encourage us to think about pollution in the context of our own lives.

Or I remember in college, when in pairs we pretended to walk through the London fog, and we each had to choose music or a song that referenced the fog. I used a Kendrick Lamar song. And later, we ended up using something similar at the end of the show. It was the first time I’d devised in that way. It really did feel like it was all our shows. It wasn’t like ‘this is Brian’s show and you’re just in it’, it was like: ‘we’re doing this together. If you have an idea, if we like it, let’s do it.’”

William Mokori, *Fog Everywhere*, 2017

“See, people like us don’t get justice
You gotta trust us we ain’t gonna bust dis
See if the gov don’t care ‘bout us
Why would they care ‘bout fumes from a bus
See if May don’t care ‘bout us
Why should she care ‘bout our lungs and stuff?
Sorry ‘bout tryna call your bluff
But we both understand shit’s kinda rough
Any solution it won’t be enough
This pollution shit is kinda tough
Their kids breathe this air and they still don’t care
People lose their heads and they still don’t care
Youts wind up dead they still don’t care
So tell me why should I care?

You say we can make things change
I say that ain’t the rules of the game [repeat?]
The gov won’t care til they get a scare
Til it goes mental, a pollution Grenfell
Your life and mine is incidental.”





Phoebe Fairchild, cast member

“What made *Fog* cool was that we got to do what we liked to do. We liked to make music, so there was a music section in the show. We like to do funny stuff, and that came through. We used stuff that we young people enjoyed doing and making, and that helped us get across all the complex information, almost without realising that’s what we were doing.

I don’t think there was ever a point where I was like: ‘we’re being forced to do this’. At the same time, back at college, we were having to work on actual curriculum drama stuff. And *there*, we really were pushed to do what the curriculum wanted us to do. Whereas with *Fog*, we had three or four weeks of actually putting our own ideas onstage.

I work in young people’s theatre now, and sometimes it feels like there’s a weird dynamic where young people aren’t trusted to know what they’re talking about. **It’s very rare that young people get the chance to make theatre that is theirs, rather than other people’s. If that were more common, it might lead to bigger change.**”

Juan Pablo Hernandez, cast member

“It felt like some days there was an air of uncertainty from some of my peers – like ‘what are we doing?’, that kind of stuff. But for most of it, I felt ‘let’s trust the process’. OK, so you couldn’t see the end product from looking at each thing we did individually. But all the bits of the puzzle came together at the end. And that was interesting as a performer, just giving in to that. Trusting it, and learning what it gives you when you trust it – and what happens when you don’t. The more we trusted, the more we went along with the activities we did day-by-day to shape the show, the more it paid off at the end.

And it always felt like a conversation. **I always felt able to put forward what I was thinking, and that it was welcome. It was the first time that I created in that way. Everything that I ended up saying in the actual show was stuff I’d said or expressed as part of the process.** I learned a lot from that. Fog definitely gave me confidence to express myself and my opinion, and put it into what I create.”



Emily Mills, *Fog Everywhere*, 2017

“So what so what, you just accept it?
Do fuck all like a climate sceptic?
Take what you’re given, do what you’re told
Cough when you’re young, never get old?
Change can happen, here’s a newsletter
The Victorian fog, that got better
They thought *that* smoke was here to stay
And then they made it go away
No more pea-soupers, Jack the Ripper
The dark got bright, the day went glitter
Change can happen, don’t be a quitter
Get even, g – and don’t get bitter”



Andrew Grieve, air quality analyst, Environmental Research Group, Imperial College

“The thing that really struck me about the performance was the way that the teenagers spoke about their sense of place and their view of what the city would be like when they were older. Some of them were a bit fatalistic about what the city they grew up in would be like when they were older. And some of them felt that we still have the chance to change this.

It links to the climate change agenda, of which I think you could argue, a lot of it is being driven by teenagers and younger people, who are looking at their future, and thinking ‘I want a say in how it’s going to be’. That aspect of hearing from a younger generation about their aspirations for their city and their environment, from an air quality perspective that was really valuable.”



Pele Green, cast member

“I remember the second show we did. At the end we came back onstage and everyone was clapping, it felt so surreal. It felt very like: ‘wow – this is a big thing! This is crazy.’ You’re doing a show about pollution and it feels like it’s not a show about pollution. It’s a show about our lives, and what our lives might have in store for us. About how pollution affects all of us, but how each of us has our own unique stories. And at the same time, if we work together, we can make a future that’s better.

It felt: ‘wow – people actually want to watch this and want to know our thoughts on it.’ It felt like we had a say in how the older generation see us. Sometimes there’s this sense of: the younger generation – they don’t know anything! Their opinions are not valid. ***Fog made me realise that we do have a voice. It’s not higher or lower than anybody else’s. But it can be more passionate, and it has an equal say, no matter what age we are. We have a say, and we have a right to be heard as well. Because it’s our future.***”



The Lancet

“The authenticity of the actors (who were encouraged to be themselves as much as possible), created familiar scenes of teenage social interaction and culture that can be seen and heard on London streets, in schools, and in homes. With no one older than 18 onstage, there was no one to suppress the cast’s ideas, silence their voices, or tell them what to think. They talked about their hopes for the future, their fears, and their passions, which was both entertaining and inspiring.

It is refreshing to see young people given a platform to speak up about what matters to them—even more exciting when the opportunity creates a heightened awareness about an issue that has been widely ignored... It is precisely these types of projects, involving these types of people, in these types of theatres that make London what it is.”

Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*

“Maybe we haven’t progressed as far as we like to think from the dirty air of Victorian London...These youngsters make you think about every breath you take”

A Younger Theatre

“A play, but also a concert, a sitcom, a science lesson and a rap battle...
An evening of fun but also an evening of hope”

What’s On Stage

“The ace in the hole here is the cast, capable of giving a rawness and vibrant realism to these issues... [Fog Everywhere has] an unsettling message, delivered with deft surety ★★★★★”



Fog Everywhere ran for two weeks at CPT. Around its performance, a series of discussion events were programmed, whose panellists included Green Party London mayoral candidate Sian Berry, as well as representatives from Camden Town Unlimited, Greenpeace, Sustrans, Invisible Dust, the Cross River Partnership, Friends of The Earth and the visual arts-based Clean Air Now campaign.

After its CPT run, leading air pollution expert Prof. Frank Kelly of the Environmental Research Group at Kings College invited the company to perform some scenes at the college's Christmas Seminar given by Deputy Mayor for the Environment, Shirley Rodrigues. In 2019, the company were invited by environmental organisation Julie's Bicycle to re-stage scenes from the show at a conference launching the inaugural London Climate Week led by Sadiq Kahn.

Before that, *Fog Everywhere* became the first theatre performance ever invited to be staged a full council meeting at Camden Town Hall, to an audience of councillors assembled to legislate on new air quality measures for the borough. After the performance of *Fog*, councillors voted for Camden to become the UK's first local authority to adopt WHO standards on air quality.



Cllr Adam Harrison, Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Camden

“I was new in post in Camden and thinking about what our environmental priorities were going to be. I’d been a councillor for a number of years, and air quality was coming up increasingly among residents. Then it was drawn to my attention that there was this play on. So I came to see it, and it was excellent. The acting was so good. The whole thing was put together so well. And the sensory experience! I don’t remember if you actually filled the theatre with smoke, but it certainly felt like you did.

So I asked if you could come and perform the play at that full council meeting. Partly because the show deserved a wider audience – but also because in a very visual and sensory way it emphasised the points we were trying to make at council level.

It had a great impact. The councillors really loved it, there was lots of praise afterwards. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything quite like that in the chamber. It was a memorable evening that really helped us set up what we wanted to do, really set the stage for some of the political capital I needed to be making. And of course, it gave the actors a venue and some visibility that the play richly deserved.”



Juan Pablo Hernandez, cast member

“That’s the dream, that your art can provoke thought or even make a change. The whole experience was testimony for me that you can reach people regarding subjects and stuff that you care about. As a young person, it made me feel that way. It made me believe that you can tell your own story about what you care about, and that that can be turned into a professional show that people want to watch.

And having gone to perform there at the Town Hall, in front of people who are making these political decisions and have the power to make change? That was empowering for me because before that, I didn’t think art could do that. That really did stick with me.”



Cllr Adam Harrison, Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Camden

“It wasn’t a coincidence that your show happened when it did. There was a level of concern that people had at the time, and still have. It wasn’t necessarily going to find expression through the arts, but it was great that it did.

It can be easy if you’re a councillor to think that, once you’ve said something, everyone knows what it is and they’ve heard the message. And that words – our words – are enough.

But actually the visual is so important; other ways of expressing things are important. When you have something that’s artistic, which is trying to speak to people in a different way, to tap into things they will feel and respond to, that’s really powerful. Most elected officials aren’t artists. But when we can work together on these really major challenges, that’s hugely valuable.”



Andrew Grieve, air quality analyst,
Environmental Research Group, Imperial College

“Art and science collaborations are crucial for scientists to be able to communicate what can potentially be dry or complex things that people might pass over in other circumstances. To be able to present that material in an engaging way is vital.

For myself, I spend most of my time looking at graphs and data. And I find collaborations with artists, and I’ve done a few, crucial in giving me a grounding in what’s important to people in terms of how they view air quality. And help me keep a finger on the pulse, I guess, of what people are thinking and what’s important, so I don’t just become a guy in an office looking at graphs.”





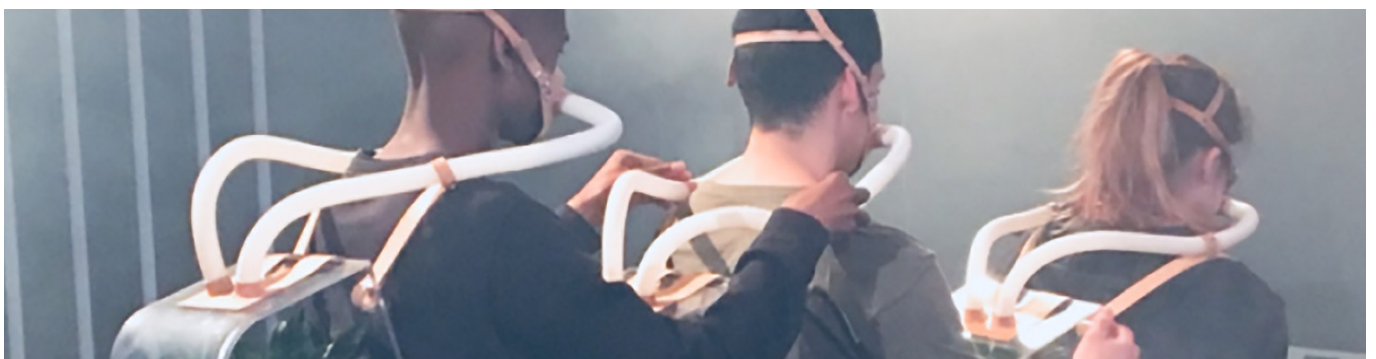
Phoebe Fairchild, cast member

“Before I did *Fog Everywhere*, I was very quiet and didn’t really enjoy putting myself out there. My experience on that production completely changed the way I am. Even now, the facts I learned from *Fog*, I bring up all the time. And the stuff that I learned from making *Fog*, I still teach today. I still use some of the exercises, I still draw on it to talk about ways to make my own theatre. It properly changed my whole way of seeing drama. It made me realise: you can make your own theatre, you don’t need to follow anyone else.”

Tobi-King Bakare, cast member

“Just to add as well that, as a young performer, it was lovely to have this as a first experience. Because it broke down all those distinctions about the professional industry. We got to understand what it feels like to be an actor working when we were so young and when we’d just started to love it. I remember when we first found out we were going to be doing it in the theatre and that we were getting paid for it. That just felt like a bonus – because the work itself was what I wanted to do creatively. It just felt like fun.

And having that experience, I realise now, allowed me to think: I can do this. Making your own theatre, and making theatre that can have an impact on the world, is not something alien. It’s achievable. It’s achievable for people like me.”



Useful links / resources:

Camden People's Theatre

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

World Health Organisation air quality guidelines

[https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)

UK air quality

<https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/air-pollution/>

Refer to our [ACE Quality Principles](#) for work being produced by, with, and for children and young people

Relevant ACE resources for developing and evaluating projects include [Inspiring Learning for All](#) and the [Self-Evaluation Framework](#)

Arts Council England

The Hive

49 Lever Street

Manchester

M1 1FN

Website www.artscouncil.org.uk

Phone 0161 934 4317

Email enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk

Textphone 020 7973 6564

Arts Council England is the trading name of The Arts Council of England.
Charity registration number 1036733.

You can get this document in Braille, in large print, on audio CD, and in various electronic formats. Please contact us if you need any of these.

We are committed to being open and accessible. We welcome all comments on our work.

Please send these comments to our Enquiries Team at:
enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk

Or use the contact form on our website at: www.artscouncil.org.uk/contact-us

© Arts Council England, 2021