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Digital Theatre Transformation:

A case study and digital toolkit

Final Report, October 2020

Researchers: Pascale Aebischer and Rachael Nicholas,
University of Exeter.

Foreword

The start of the pandemic already feels a long time ago, few of us could have imagined how vastly different the world, and the performing arts sector would be at the end of 2020 compared to the beginning. When lockdown started, it was clear to us that we had a duty to do two things – entertain our audience and find ways to pay our freelance teams to make work.

This clarity of purpose has shaped our focus on creating work with the audience experience at its heart. It's also done more than supporting artists financially, they have given their buy-in with what in the "old normal" could have been a very difficult ask. I don't think the performers, Equity or ourselves as producers would have thought it was feasible for actors to perform regularly from their own homes and yet the situation we have found ourselves in has exposed some significant benefits to access, work life balance, and the environment in doing so.

What started as an experiment has developed into a radical pivot in our work, against a backdrop of what has at times felt like cultural meltdown we have perversely flourished. Digital work has provided a rich and exciting new medium to explore which will remain embedded in our work for the future. We remain indebted to our brave performers and intrepid audience members who made our first foray with The Tempest such a success.

It was apt and completely by chance that The Tempest was the show we had up our sleeve to explore this new medium with. With theatres closed, in the performing arts it really did feel like we were fighting for our lives in an enormous storm over which we had no control, with a swell of waves that could engulf us all. Like the characters in The Tempest, though, we found our way to a strange, new, magical world to explore. We've been enormously lucky that we had the most incredible team to embrace this new medium, and the genius that is Zoe Seaton at the helm. 'How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, that has such people in 't!'

Lucy Askew (Creation Theatre) and Zoe Seaton (Big Telly), 20 October 2020

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Summary of findings

Business Model and Changes to the Company's Administration

Business Model and Restructuring
- Creation Theatre's overall turnover reduced by 32% between 17 March – 17 July 2019 and the same period in 2020
- The physical office was immediately closed in March 2020 and all operations moved online
- Income from grants and education activities has proportionately shrunk, while income from shows and fundraising has proportionately increased
- The company's rate of productivity has grown, with its first show, The Tempest, adapted from a physical production staged in 2019 to a virtual production staged within 3 weeks of lockdown in April 2020
- Creation Theatre has been able to pay the freelancers it works with Equity wages and make a modest surplus, made possible by a very significant reduction in its overheads and by charging audiences £20 per device
- Creation Theatre's permanent staff base was cut from 9 to 5, with two maternity leaves and two furloughs, and non-furloughed staff reduced their contracted hours by 20%
- After August 2020, the company gradually brought back its furloughed staff and expects to have all furloughed staff back by November 2020.

Challenges
- the current economic uncertainty
- the flooding of the market with high-quality archival recordings
- the UK Government's funding package for the performing arts which largely neglects non-building-based companies like Creation Theatre and the freelancers who create its shows
- the reduction in income from Education activities and grants
- the changes in audience behaviours

Opportunities
- reduced expenditure and increased productivity
- less time and carbon expended on travel
- audience development including national and international reach and access opportunities for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse audiences as well as for families and elderly audience members
- increased opportunities for diverse casting
- new networks and creative partnerships
- new sources of funding

Understanding the impact of shift to online working for Creation Theatre staff

Working from home
- for Creation Theatre's administrative staff, home working has involved setting up a home office with laptop/PC, webcam, and secure internet
- working online facilitates multi-tasking and enables the Creative Producer, Producer, Production Manager and Stage Manager to have greater oversight of creative processes and of the wellbeing of the creative team
- Digital shows facilitate the visibility of the company's 'face' (Lucy Askew, CE and Creative Producer and/or Crissy O'Donovan, Producer) before and after each show, enabling direct contact with the virtual audience
- Digital home-working has greatly increased the flexibility of working hours and cancelled the need to travel for work, with benefits for work/life balance, wellbeing, concentration and productivity

Environmental gains
- Digital home-working has brought tangible environmental gains, with a reduction in the use of paper and printing, travel, and waste packaging

Challenges
- Maintaining work/life balance in a flexible home-working environment
- No longer having informal chats in the office
- Difficulty having conversations with the audience outside the shows

Opportunities
- Overall mostly positive changes from home working
- Reduced fatigue from travel
- Increased ability to combine work with childcare
- Increased productivity and ability to multi-task and have creative oversight

Making Digital Theatre

Digital Theatre Transformation
- Digital transformation of creative work was facilitated by Creation Theatre's prior experience of site-specific immersive modes of working and the adaptability of the creative team
- Digital theatre is related to live film and live gaming, with a palette of genres it can draw on and combine, involving various levels of audience participation
- Digital theatre is much faster to produce than physical theatre and requires fewer core members of backstage creative staff

Changes to Roles and Skills sets
- The roles that have been most affected by the digital transformation are those of the production manager and stage manager, with lesser but still significant changes for the director, designer and the performers.
- All members of the creative team have developed new digital skills sets and required training

Equipment Requirements
- All members of the creative team have needed additional computing hardware, software and applications, and performers have needed additional studio equipment (lights, green screen)

Performing on Zoom
- Performers had to adapt their performance style to Zoom and learn to work with cameras, microphones, and do virtual blocking to establish eyelines and exchanges of props.
- Performing for Zoom puts a high cognitive burden on performers who have to operate their own technical cues and be ready to improvise to cover up connectivity glitches

Designing for Zoom
- For backgrounds: using chroma key and green screens for virtual backgrounds which may be static or moving, establishing spatial depth through virtual background design/props/positioning within the frame, guiding performers through the physical transformation of their home studios using accessories
- Costumes and props that are complementary to the green screens
- Lighting individual studio sets, which involves separate diffuse lighting of green screens and diagonal lighting on actors
- Sound design, including use of underscoring music, microphones, and volume control

Directing for Zoom
- Recognising the hybridity and specific affordances of the platform as a performance medium
- Establishing a dramaturgy that affects running time and script editing, audience participation, pre-recorded video content, storytelling, and creating a strong sense of liveness and community, with a focus on the curtain call

Challenges of the Zoom platform
- Its design as a videoconferencing platform
- Tiny lags that make synchronisation of sound and movement impossible in live performance
- Compatibility with software and hardware
- Connectivity

Opportunities from performing on Zoom
- Reduction in overheads (no venue, rehearsal room, theatre lighting, physical set design, travel, accommodation, physical adaptation for accessibility)
- Comfort of access for audiences
- Environmental gains including 99% reduction in carbon cost from audiences not travelling to a venue

Understanding the impact of shift to online working for creative staff

Rehearsals
- Reduction in length of rehearsal time overall and of individual rehearsals, to accommodate Zoom fatigue and maximise focus
- Producers, Production Manager and Stage Manager are able to be on-hand throughout rehearsals to resolve issues without delay
- Zoom rehearsals affect company cohesion and social interaction, presenting challenges for performers used to physical modes of interaction with one another and their audience
- Zoom rehearsals therefore require additional structural frameworks to facilitate social exchanges and open communication, as well as clear signposting of what the company is expected to do in breakout room rehearsals
- Zoom rehearsals are very technical. Performers find the lack of physical cues challenging and have to re-train themselves to focus on scene partners' voices and maintain virtual eyelines and awareness of the camera's location.

Performing on Zoom
- Multi-tasking is required to stay in character while operating technical cues
- Performers need to manage the volume of both voice and performance
- Performers use skills that are more akin to performing for TV and radio in order to work with the cameras
- Zoom performance involves interacting with the audience, responding to spotlit audience members and talking to the audience in a way that can create a strong sense of intimacy

Behavioural changes and wellbeing

- Members of the creative team for Creation Theatre's The Tempest responded positively to the changes in their working patterns,
- Creative team members were mindful of challenges as they adapted to; working on their own, managing their own studio sets and internet connections, and the structure of their working day.
- The reduction in travel made a significant difference to company members in terms of wellbeing and being able to be with their families/households.
- Overwhelmingly, company members found that working from home benefited their work/life balance and that Creation Theatre had set clear boundaries regarding working hours
- Working from home had an impact on company members' families/household members who had to accommodate the use of home space as a studio and the use of broadband during rehearsals and performances.
- Being able to continue working during the Covid-19 pandemic had a highly positive impact on the company members' sense of wellbeing and financial security
- Company members missed physical social interaction with one another and with their audience
- At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, company members, especially if in isolation, needed additional welfare support

Environmental impact

- While energy use by individual company members has gone up, the environmental gains from not travelling to work are considerable.

Ethical and equality issues

- Digital theatre work may bring inequalities of access to work based on a performer's access to adequate home space and equipment, as well as their technical skills.
- Companies can be proactive in providing company members with equipment and training, and in guiding them through setting up their home studio
- Home working may actually increase opportunities for diverse and geographically remote performers who can access auditions more easily
- The casting process is critical in creating an environment in which diverse performers know that the technical and access support is there to create a level playing field.

The Audience: Demographics, Marketing and Motivation and Willingness to Pay

The Audience
- The Zoom production of The Tempest reached an estimated audience of 2800 across 17 performances. Booking systems that report only on tickets sold mean that it is not possible to say exactly how many people watched. Adapting booking systems for digital performances so that they capture this information may be important for companies who need to report on the reach of digital productions.
- Audiences mostly watched in small groups, with the two being the most common group size. Audiences found new ways of 'watching together' via Zoom by watching the same performance as family members and friends in different locations.
- Audiences for the Zoom production were similar in age to those for the 2019 analogue production, with the data indicating that the Zoom audience may have been slightly older than the analogue audience.
- The Zoom performances attracted audiences from a wider geographical area, both nationally within the UK, and internationally.

Marketing and Audience Motivation
- Audiences for the Zoom performances were mostly audiences already familiar with Creation Theatre, but it was also effective at reaching new audiences. There is some evidence that Zoom theatre is developing audiences for this particular format.
- Email and social media were the most common ways that audiences found out about the Zoom The Tempest, but radio and online/newspaper articles were also effective ways of reaching audiences.
- Audiences were motivated to watch The Tempest both by the novelty of the form and their previous knowledge of Creation, highlighting the need to balance familiarity and innovation in the marketing of online theatre.
- The majority of audiences felt that the Zoom experience was good value for money, and would be willing to pay to watch other Zoom theatre (both in and out of lockdown).
- Audiences said that they would be most likely to watch adaptations of well-known works, as well as new plays via Zoom.

Value for Money, Pricing Models and Willingness to Pay for Zoom Theatre
- Audiences felt that The Tempest represented good value for money and indicated a willingness to continue to engage with, and pay for, Zoom theatre experiences, even when theatres reopen. Creation Theatre's audiences placed extra value on the fact that the production was created specifically to be watched online, that it was live, and that they were able to actively participate.
- Audiences who initially thought the experience was expensive often changed their mind once they had experienced the show, suggesting that prior experience and knowledge of quality are important in willingness to pay.
- Audiences were not necessarily aware of the costs involved in producing online work, which influenced their perception of value. Greater transparency around the labour involved in producing online work may increase willingness to pay.

- There was a large amount of variation in terms of what audiences deemed affordable or good value, which was often based on what audiences were used to paying (with even greater variation between international/US audiences and UK audiences). While the majority of audiences felt that the fixed price-per-device strategy represented good value, introducing tiered offerings or concessionary prices may increase willingness to pay for a wider audience.
- The risk of Covid-19 continues influence the decisions audience make around theatre attendance, which influences their willingness to pay for Zoom theatre. This willingness is therefore likely to fluctuate in relation to infection rates and the availability and safety of live theatre, highlighting a need to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances.
- Many audience members see Zoom theatre as a new and different experience which represents distinct benefits from live theatre, and they would be willing to pay for similar experiences, even in a post-pandemic landscape.

The Audience: Behaviour, Experience and Impact

Audience Behaviour
- Audiences mostly watched in living areas, and on laptops.
- Audience found it easy to use Zoom, but communicating instructions clearly to audiences was still important.
- Audiences approached the experience in multiple ways, with some replicating an approach similar to in-person theatre, and others taking advantage of the opportunity to watch in a more relaxed way.
- Despite moving around, talking, etc., audiences said they focused on the show, with audience participation increasing engagement and focus.
- Being able to discuss the experience with others was important for audiences, with audiences especially interacting socially before and after the performance.

Audience Experience
- The majority of audiences enjoyed their experience of watching the Zoom Tempest; they enjoyed the look and style of the production and found the experience engaging, uplifting and often emotionally moving.
- Watching live was important to audiences, with audiences enjoying the unpredictability of live performance, sharing the experience with other audience members, and the ability to participate actively in the production.
- Audience participation was particularly enjoyable for audiences. The majority of respondents were happy to keep their cameras on and audiences explained that doing so increased their engagement with the production. However, having the option to turn the camera off was also important to audiences.
- Despite being a remote production, audiences were able to feel like they were connected with the actors and other audience members and as though they were part of a community. Being able to see other audience members, the use of direct address, and participating with family and friends were key to creating this sense of community among audience members.

Audience Impact

- Maintaining mental health and wellbeing, and reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness were key impacts of the production on audiences. Audiences described having something to look forward to, the feeling of participating as part of a community during the production, and having something to talk to other people about afterwards as contributing to their mental health and decreasing isolation.

- The production provided hope and inspiration about the future of the theatre industry, especially for those audience members with a professional interest in theatre.

- Watching the production made audiences feel more engaged with the arts, suggesting that Zoom theatre could have longer-term impacts on audience development beyond the pandemic.

Digital Toolkit

This digital toolkit is aimed at performers and companies embarking on transforming their physical theatre practice into a digital mode of home working for both office staff and creative practitioners. It consists of:

1. Advice from the 2020 Creation Theatre/Big Telly Tempest team for creative practitioners and marketing/front of house staff
2. A set of guidelines for companies that are based on our research and written in collaboration with representatives of Equity UK
3. A checklist for Zoom productions compiled with Giles Stoakley, the Production Manager of The Tempest.

Advice from the Tempest team for companies embarking on Zoom performance

In response to our staff questionnaire, the cast members for the 2020 digital Tempest offer the following pieces of advice:

The home studio set-up:
- Set up your studio! Your laptop - learn how to use it and where to store images for backgrounds, how to send and receive files. Play with the lighting, consider the natural light that you will have at different times of the day - don't get to your first 7.30pm show and realise it's too dark!
- make an environment that allows the greatest movement within the green screen that you set up for yourself.
- Sort out your sound quality.
- Multiple screens and large screens make life much easier

Performing for Zoom:
- Your stage is your little zoom box - learn its extremities and how to use it. Play with how close or far away you are from the camera for each moment. Learn to 'interact' with your backgrounds to bring them to life and make it believable your character is in that environment.
- Have a bit of knowledge about Zoom's capabilities and what you can achieve online
- Watch your voice - you end up talking all day when you're on zoom!
- Keep experimenting and growing throughout. It is crucial to find ways to involve the audience or it is just like a bit of cheap telly.
- Don't put things in your way just because it's unfamiliar.
- Work out your eyelines when actors are performing duologues. It makes it much more realistic.
- Be prepared for the tech to let you down.

Directorial choices:
- Involve your audience in the story, they should feel a part of the progress of the play.
- Think about how to make the audience feel important and that their involvement affects the story. Otherwise, you'd be better off pre-recording something.
- Make sure you are as slick as you can be. If we can see any technical gaps in the performance it breaks the illusion.
- A technical stumbling block is just an opportunity to be creative
- Be playful. Trust your theatre instincts and see when you're excited: if you are bored, be really alive to that.
- Don't try to make a film.
- Don't approach the medium as a compensation for live work, instead embrace it as a new platform.
- Keep the running time shorter than 75 minutes, to allow for Zoom fatigue.

Rehearsing and working with others on Zoom:

- Keep the shows and rehearsal days short (limit the online rehearsal day to 5 hours and keep any one rehearsal to less than 2.5 hours, with breaks)
- Curate the rehearsals with great care. Make sure everyone has said hello to everyone else. Maybe have an individual check-in at the start so everyone gets a chance to speak.
- Be hyper sensitive to all participants, in order to glean nuances in communication.
- If you are tired, inform the people you are working with.
- Be aware that it's a very different style of working that doesn't suit everyone. Some may absolutely love and thrive online but others may not enjoy acting/ working/ viewing online.
- Have 'what if' conversations so performers know what to do if someone suddenly isn't there etc.
- Consider scheduling non-compulsory, inclusive social sessions at reasonable intervals throughout the rehearsal and performance period to allow performers to get to know one another, build relationships and trust, exchange notes and debrief after a performance.

Stage management for Zoom:

- Embrace the fact that some things are out of your control
- Have back up stage managers ready to jump in if the main one gets kicked out of the Zoom meeting

Front of House relations with the audience:

- Know your bookers - the people who have been to many of your shows physically need to continue to be valued as they'll help spread the word.
- Share, thank, retweet, post on social media every day.
- Widen your database with loads of new bookers and make sure that they get the option to be added to the mailing list

Guidelines for companies

These guidelines for companies are based on the project interviews with Creation Theatre and Big Telly's staff and creative teams, and are drawn up with Stephen Duncan-Rice (South East Regional Organiser, Equity UK) and Dan Edge (Vice Chair of the D/deaf and Disabled Members Committee, Equity UK). They constitute a preliminary set of guidelines for digital theatre work that will in due course be superseded by Equity UK's industry guidelines, which will be informed by this preliminary document.

Casting

Job descriptions should focus on the role and not on either the performer's technical skills sets or their equipment.

- The only equipment that may be expected of the performer for the purposes of casting should be access to any device that makes video conferencing possible. This could be a smartphone, a tablet computer, or a laptop/PC with integrated or separate webcam.
- Technical support should be an integral part of the process of casting, to create an environment in which performers are confident about applying for a job even if they have no prior experience of digital performance.
- Casting should take account of individual performers' access requirements. See the further guidelines on 'accessibility' below.
- Questions regarding the performer's individual living arrangements, home space, sound insulation, and confidence with technology are inappropriate at the point of casting.
- It is not reasonable to expect performers to have access to an environment entirely free from background noise or a plain white background. It is the responsibility of companies to work with performers subsequent to casting to find solutions for such technical issues.

The job is about acting, not technical ability or ownership of equipment.

Contracts

Performers' contracts need to set out the respective responsibilities of the company and the performer in a digital home-working setting. They should:

- Clearly state the total number hours of rehearsal time (per day and overall) and the working hours of the company.
- Be explicit about the fact that the safety of the home studio cannot be conclusively checked by the production manager/stage manager without the performer's co-operation.
- Take account of the fact that a part of the performer's home has to be converted into a studio set for the duration of the rehearsal and performance periods.
- Factor in the amount of time required for performers to set up and strike their studio sets inside their homes ahead and after each rehearsal and performance. This additional working time should be included in the contracted hours.
- Recognise the impact of home-working on other individuals within the performer's households.
- Recognise the impact of home-working on performers' utility bills. Company members should be reminded of their rights to claim for items of work-related expenditure such as mobile phone and internet costs, as well as the use of a home as an office in their tax self-assessment. For guidance, see https://www.equity.org.uk/media/4332/equity-tax-and-nics-guide-2019-20.pdf.

- Recognise that remote working for actors involves significant amounts of preparation time outside rehearsals with the director. This preparation time includes individual work on learning to use the technology (with online tutorials and additional support by the company), set up a studio in a suitable room, experiment with the technology and rehearse technical cues alone and with scene partners. This labour comes in addition to the normal expectations regarding learning lines and private rehearsals with scene partners. Half a day of working time should therefore be added for performers needing to set up a home studio, and another half day for personal development training on digital platforms and private rehearsals of technical cues.[1]
- Recognise that the job includes some elements of the work normally associated with the Stage Manager or Designer and that performers will have to be guided by those members of the creative team in setting up their own design and tech environments and equipment.
- Be explicit about whether rehearsals and performances will be recorded. Such recordings should only take place with the consent of the members of the company and should only happen in line with the terms of existing collective agreements (including ensuring the terms of future usage are clear and agreed upon at point of contract).

Tech support

Companies are responsible for supporting their workers with loans of hardware (where required: laptop, monitor, webcam, soft box lights, remote controls, microphones), acquisition of software and training required for digital performance. Equipment owned by a member of the creative team may be used in consultation with that individual performer. Any private expenditure on equipment that is purchased by a member of the creative team in order to facilitate a performance should be mutually agreed before the purchase and either directly paid for by the company or refunded upon submission of receipts. Equipment purchased in this way is owned by the company and must be returned to it in good working order at the end of the contract.

Training may include directing performers to online tutorials and step-by-step instructions in how to use the software required for a digital show; it should also include one-to-one support of individuals by the Stage Manager or other company technician.

Welfare support

Companies are responsible for supporting their workers in their home-working environments. Companies should designate a specific member of staff who acts as their Welfare Support Officer, who should receive the training necessary to be able to provide support.

Welfare support involves ensuring that there are clear rules of engagement and lines of communication set up at the start of employment, with staff informed about how to contact the Welfare Support Officer. The Welfare Support Officer should explicitly and individually check in with each performer to offer support if needed at regular points during rehearsal and performance periods.

Information about mental health resources for company members, including Equity's 24-hour mental health helpline and Equity's guide to staying safe online, is available on Equity's website at htttps://www.equity.org.uk/at-work/bullying-harassment/mental-health-resources/.

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[1] Estimates of time required based on the experience of Creation Theatre performers on Zoom. Performers who have a home studio and have experience working with the digital platform of choice will only need appropriate time, depending on the complexity of the technical cues, to rehearse these in private.

Accessibility

When working digitally with D/deaf, Disabled or Neurodiverse talent accessibility must also be considered. Each individual artist will have their own set of access requirements. We recommend that a company, when inviting artists to audition for a piece, should send out an access requirements form to all artists, regardless of status. This enables the artist to tell the company what they require to make the audition process accessible them and in turn allows the company to get that support into place for the artist.

Such support might include, for example:

- Not using the chat function in Zoom because it does not work well with screen readers for visually impaired artists.
- Making sure there is a qualified BSL interpreter if you are working with native BSL users.
- Sending script for audition in specific formats, so they may be accessed by screen readers or just be easier to read.
- Allowing extra time before audition where possible and in audition if certain support is needed etc.

This is not an exhaustive list, but an indication of the reasonable adjustments that might need to be put in place.

Once a job is offered to a D/deaf, Disabled or Neurodiverse artist, it is best practice to discuss with the artist what their reasonable adjustments are (for example more regular screen breaks may be needed), and to establish any access requirements that need to be met, so as to enable that artist to give their best work. Companies are also responsible for offering D/deaf, Disabled or Neurodiverse artists tech support that meets their individual needs.

You need to create the environment in which you know the opportunity for raising an access problem is there.

Empowering your artists to do so is not only best practice but also enables the artists you engage to do their best work.

For more information on working with talent or to answer any questions you may have please email the Equity D/deaf and Disabled Members Committee at disabilitycommittee@equity.org.uk.

Equity Deputy

At the start of the rehearsal period, all companies should have a Union meeting, either face-to-face or via video call, at which an Equity Deputy is elected who liaises with the Equity Representative throughout the rehearsal and production period. The meeting should set up clear lines of communication between actors, the company and the Union representative.

Rehearsals

Online rehearsals are more tiring than physical rehearsals; excessive screen time for performers can provoke eyestrain, reduced concentration and voice fatigue. They should therefore include frequent breaks and be limited in time, with a maximum of 5 hours per day for any one member of the cast, with no rehearsal session longer than 2.5 hours.

Rules of engagement for rehearsals, company policies and chains of communication need to be set up clearly at the start.

You need to create the environment in which you know the opportunity for raising a problem is there.

We recommend that:

- Performers who are not needed in a scene be allowed to virtually leave the rehearsal space, either by ending the video call, switching off their camera, or moving out of shot, so as to reduce the amount of screen time where possible.
- rehearsals start and end with breakout group sessions at which members of the cast can communicate with one another informally before the start of the rehearsals.
- The Welfare Support Officer drop in on breakout group sessions to have informal conversations to establish performer welfare, needs for further technical support, and iron out potential misunderstandings that have arisen in rehearsals.
- Explicit procedures be agreed ahead of the first performance to deal with potential internet failures during a performance. Companies must not rely entirely on actors' improvisational skills to cover outages but ought to have additional strategies in place (e.g. provision of 'elastic content' or member of the creative team ready to read in).

Risk assessment

All companies should carry out a risk assessment of their proposed activities in line with the statutory requirement under Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.[2] The purpose of a risk assessment is to identify the hazards that workers and other people may encounter in the workplace, assess the level of risk posed by each hazard and plan reasonable steps to minimise the level of risk. Companies should look at:

- Who might be harmed and how
- What is already being done to control the risk
- What further action can and should be taken to control the risk
- Who needs to carry out the further action
- When the action is needed by

Sample risk assessment templates are available from the Health & Safety Executive at https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm.

In line with Equity UK's guidance, we recommend that risk assessments bet carried out even if a company has fewer than five employees and are therefore not legally required to record their findings, and that they be shared with those covered by the risk assessment. Risk assessments should be treated as living documents that are adapted as circumstances change; they should also be compiled in consultation with affected members of the company.

While digital performance minimises the risk of Covid-19 transmission because it eliminates physical contact between performers and audiences, effective risk assessment is particularly challenging in a digital environment because production managers and stage managers do not have physical access to the performers' individual homes and technological set-ups. Risk assessment is also complicated by the fact that responsibility for the safety regulations within a workplace is divided between the company as employer and the owner of the property (the performer or their landlords).

2 These guidelines are based on and adapted from Equity UK's guidelines for Risk Assessments for outdoor performances in the context of Covid-19 at https://www.equity.org.uk/news/2020/july/returning-to-outdoor-work-in-live-performance-guidance-for-equity-members/.

Risk assessment should be limited to the equipment and environment the company members use for work and need not cover the rest of a company member's home environment.

Companies should therefore have a clear procedure in place whereby:

- The production manager leads a collective discussion about the risks of working online and how these can be minimised by the group.
- The production manager has individual meetings with performers to understand and work through the performers' technological set-up and home working environment. Clear, consistent and regular communication in accessible formats is important to improve understanding among company members and to identify potential improvements.
- The company engages with company members to agree any changes to working patterns or practices.
- Members of the company are guided through the appropriate safety checks ahead of each rehearsal and performance (integrated into the half-hour call). This may involve performers working through a checklist or the production manager/stage manager performing a camera sweep of the performers' home set-ups, to check through a list of potential hazards.

In its guidance (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts), the UK Government furthermore recommends that companies make a copy of their risk assessment available on their website.

Safeguarding

Companies need explicitly to safeguard the privacy of their staff and, where applicable, their audiences in an online environment in which details of performers' and audiences' homes and private lives may be made visible through the use of webcams. This involves:

- Agreeing boundaries and clear expectations with performers regarding the visibility of their homes before, during and after the show (curtain calls, when green screens may be turned off and interiors be revealed).
- Giving clear information to audience members that alerts them to the potential dangers of unmuted video and audio before, during and after a performance.
- Obtaining explicit consent from both performers and audiences regarding any visual or audio access to their homes and private lives.

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Zoom Theatre Technical Checklist
(Giles Stoakley, Production Manager, The Tempest)

Pre-rehearsal

Setting up Zoom:
- **Zoom account:** There are different levels, numbers of participants, branding options and time limits (see https://zoom.us/pricing). One option that is available are 'webinars', which allow participants to watch and which can dramatically increase the size of an audience. However, webinars do not enable interaction, with audiences visible to the performers and one another.
Because webinars do not allow interaction, Creation Theatre did not choose this option and normally capped the number of participating devices at 120. Larger numbers are possible, but the more participants there are, the more difficult it is to move people around. (Remember that each participating device might be viewed by more than one audience member: the number of 'participants' is not the same as audience numbers).
- **Audit and check your company's devices**: Zoom appears and works differently on different operating systems and devices. For Zoom's specifications for static or moving virtual backgrounds, https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360043484511-System-requirements-for-Virtual-Background. Note that the way Zoom is set up for iPad tablets restricts gallery view in a way performers have found difficult to work with.
- **Familiarise yourself with how to use Waiting Rooms and Breakout Rooms.**
- **Camera set-up**: decide whether to use built-in or external cameras, and whether you will be using multiple cameras. Zoom is good at switching between cameras quickly.
Zoom-compatible software for altering and mixing camera feeds includes ManyCam (used for filters and making it look different; see https://manycam.com/), OBS (open-source software for video recording and live streaming; see https://obsproject.com/) or vMix (vision mixing live production and streaming software that enables transitioning between video feeds and cameras; see https://www.vmix.com/)
- **Audio set-up**: decide whether to use built-in and/or external microphones and set up the sound settings in Zoom. Built-in and webcam microphones have a tendency to be very directional, which can lead to uneven sound if performers are facing away from the device or are performing in a large room, at a distance from the microphone.
If using music to underscore a scene, be aware that playing music through the Zoom settings can make it difficult to hear the actors, especially if they are not speaking directly into their microphone. To improve audibility, Zoom's audio settings can be adjusted by disabling the suppression of intermittent background noise, moderating the suppression of persistent background noise, enabling original sound and turning on original sound.
- **Playing music and SFX through Zoom**: Zoom has excellent compatibility with QLab (https://QLab.app/), through which music and other effects can be added in. QLab recognises that you have Zoom, and you can assign Zoom as the output for QLab.
- **Playing video through Zoom or QLab**: Playing video can be difficult. It is possible to screenshare from within Zoom. An alternative is or have a stage manager's computer in the call and play a video on their second screen, which their computer is looking at, and then spotlight that screen.
- **Additional monitors and multiple Zoom windows**: If a device is connected to two monitors, it is possible to enable a split-screen setting on Zoom that has 'Speaker View' on one monitor and 'Gallery View' on the other. The split-screen setting allows the Stage Manager to monitor what the audience is doing and spotlight audience devices at moments of interactive participation; it also enables performers to see each other and/or their audience.
- **Green screen/virtual backgrounds**: select backgrounds through video settings > virtual background. For more guidance, see https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/210707503-Virtual-Background.

Other pre-rehearsal preparation:
- **Internet Connection**: Make contingency plans for connectivity problems. This may involve broadband upgrades and use of mobile telephone data.
- **Data Protection and Safeguarding**: Protect your audience and actors with passwords and security, in line with GDPR. Be mindful of your audience's privacy if you are asking them to watch a show with their cameras unmuted, especially if the show is being recorded. Inform your audience of potential risks, how to avoid them, and of their rights.
- **Copyright and PRS (Performing Rights Society)**: Check you have all the necessary permissions. Allow extra time during the Covid-19 crisis because there are longer than usual response times and you might have to contact rights holders individually.
- **Risk assessment**: see 'Guidelines for Companies' for guidance.

Rehearsal
- **Tutorial for Cast members:** guide your company through the essentials of Zoom: muting/unmuting of audio and video; camera and audio settings; changing virtual backgrounds (see https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/210707503-Virtual-Background); Zoom hotkeys (see https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205683899-Hot-Keys-and-Keyboard-Shortcuts-for-Zoom); health & safety in the home-working environment.
- **Speaker View/Gallery View settings:** it is easier to rehearse in 'Gallery View', which allows performers to see one another. In the course of rehearsals, there needs to be a transition from seeing and watching scene partners to seeing only speaker view, as that will be the setting used in performance.
  Having a two-monitor set-up makes it possible to split the screen into 'Speaker View' on one monitor and 'Gallery View' on the other. While this makes it possible for performers to continue seeing their scene partners, it can create problems in terms of eyelines if performers are looking at a screen instead of where their scene partner is located in the virtual blocking of the scene.
- **Use of the camera and spotlighting**: Zoom is set up to automatically spotlight whoever is speaking or producing a sound. Zoom's automatic spotlighting of the speaker can take 1-3 seconds to switch automatically to the source of a sound, performers therefore need to make a noise (e.g. clear their throat) as they are getting ready so as to give the camera the time to switch and be showing the speaker at the start of a line. If all performers are designated as co-hosts of the Zoom call (see https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206330935-Enabling-and-adding-a-co-host), their names will appear at the top of the 'Participants' window. This makes it possible for the Stage Manager to select which camera the audience sees and to override Zoom's automatic spotlighting of the speaker, so that reactions and silent actions can be shown.
- **Closed captioning**: Zoom makes it possible to include closed captioning, which can be either typed or cut-and-pasted from a script live by a designated person or provided by a third-party service (see https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-Getting-Started-with-Closed-Captioning).
- **Eyelines**: Agree and rehearse virtual blocking and eyelines for dialogues and larger scenes (performers can use masking tape or post-it note markers on the walls of their home studios to focus on during scenes with multiple scene partners.
- **Remote muting and camera control**: It is no longer possible to unmute participants on Zoom, but it is still possible to remotely mute participants (see https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203435537-Mute-All-And-Unmute-All). If a show requires participants to be unmuted, a host can enable participants to unmute themselves. This requires some guidance for audiences that needs to be integrated into the performance.

- **Singing/Dancing**: synchronised live singing and dancing is currently impossible on Zoom because of the tiny lags on the internet that prevent synchronisation. Scenes that require singing and/or dancing either require actors to be performing in the same room, or for them to be pre-recorded individually, edited together, and then streamed as a pre-recorded sequence.
- **Costume and props**: allow sufficient time for costume and props to be sent out by mail, fitted virtually, and altered (again, with time allowed for transport/mail).
- **Lighting**: if using green screens, performers' individual studio set-ups need to be deep enough to enable performers to maintain a 1m distance from the green screen. The green screen needs to be lit clearly and evenly without shadows (diffused 'softbox' light); performers need additional lighting on their face and body, ideally from two diagonal lights. See for example https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H413prVuG5E for guidance on matching the lighting on the performer to the background for a scene.
- **Contingency**: have a contingency plan worked out with the company in case of an internet connection going down, and set up a separate means of communication (e.g. WhatsApp group) that enables the company to communicate in the event of internet failure.
  Creation Theatre's strategy has been to use improvisation in the first instance, and either another company member 'reading in' or pre-recorded 'elastic content' in the second instance. A show stop is the final option.

Performance
- **Managing audience members**: put the audience into a waiting room before admitting them; mute the audience, and make sure the audience are informed of how to mute/unmute their audio, video, and safeguard their privacy (see 'Safeguarding' in the Guidelines above).
- **Half-hour call**: use the half-hour call to check the cast's individual studio set-up for safety hazards, in line with the procedures set up as part of your risk assessment. This also gives performers something to do while they wait for the performance to start.
- **Offstage/backstage**: ensure all company members are aware that unless their camera is muted, they and their studio sets are visible to audiences who have selected 'Gallery View' rather than 'Speaker View' to watch the performance.
- **Contingency**: ensure all company members are connected to one another and ready to follow your agreed contingency plan.
- **Curtain call**: the curtain call is an opportunity for the audience and the cast to experience a sense of communality, which can be facilitated by inviting everybody to unmute their audio and video and switch to 'Gallery View.' Ensure that safeguarding measures are in place if you are inviting your audience to reveal themselves and their homes to other audience members and the actors (see 'Safeguarding' in the Digital Toolkit's 'Guidelines').
- **Awards**: bring the show to the attention of bodies such as the Off-West End Theatre OnComm Awards (https://www.scenesaver.co.uk/oncomm-awards/) or Theatre & Technology Awards (https://www.theatreandtechawards.com/) to ensure you are considered for digital theatre awards.

Introduction

'That's what Creation did so beautifully. They said just "how are we going to make work for freelancers, and how are we going to make work for ourselves and continue to connect and to make and create this environment."' Al Barclay, Performer

'Making the decision to charge the audience was really good, and it paid off for us. … It was such a feeling of accomplishment, for the actors as well, for them it was just such an amazing feat to achieve what they achieved.' Crissy O'Donovan, Producer

Purpose of this report

Digital Theatre Transformation examines the lessons learned from the digital transformation of Creation Theatre and its co-production with Big Telly of The Tempest on the Zoom video conferencing platform during the national Covid-19 'lockdown' of 2020. The preliminary project report published on 14 August 2020 provided a snapshot of Creation Theatre's operations at the start of July 2020 against the backdrop of the economic crisis in the theatre industry caused by the pandemic and a retrospective view of its first digital show in April and May of that year.[3]

This final report incorporates and builds on the preliminary report: it includes information about Creation Theatre's work, and box office data, covering the period from July to September 2020. The Case Study contains granular information about business structures, modes of working and digital platforms, as well as first-hand accounts of how moving to digital impacts on creative choices and reduces the carbon footprint of making and watching theatre. This information equips theatre artists and companies to manage their own digital transformation in response to the changes in the industry brought about by the dual impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate emergency.

The audience research in Part 5 of the preliminary report is expanded here to include survey responses of 177 audience members and includes further insight into audience attitudes to value for money and their willingness to pay for Zoom theatre. Part 6 adds new qualitative audience research based on 22 in-depth interviews with audience members, with an emphasis on audience behaviours, audience experience, and the impact of the production on audiences. It looks at:

• How audiences watched and participated
• The importance of watching live
• Audience attitudes to participation
• Connection and community
• The benefits of participation including maintaining mental wellbeing and reducing feelings of isolation

By focusing on the reception of one successful example of digital transformation, our audience research complements the growing body of large-scale audience research into audience attitudes to theatre-going and digital work during Covid-19, including that carried out with UK audiences by Indigo over the same period. While reinforcing many of the findings of this wider research, this

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3. The preliminary Digital Theatre Transformation: A Case Study and Digital Toolkit report is archived at https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/122587.

report provides further in-depth insight into the reception of digital work and its impact on audiences, enabling UK companies to calibrate their programming and target new audiences effectively.

Our 'Digital Toolkit' offers practical advice on digital homeworking for creative practitioners and includes a set of guidelines drawn up in consultation with a representative of Equity, as well as a checklist for Zoom performance compiled with Creation Theatre's Production Manager.

Context

On 16 March 2020, the British Government responded to the Covid-19 pandemic by issuing guidance that 'everyone should avoid gatherings and crowded places, such as pubs, clubs and theatres',[4] prompting UK Theatre and the Society of London Theatre (SOLT) to advise its member venues to close and face-to-face performance to stop across the UK.[5] By 23 March, the country had entered a comprehensive 'lockdown', with guidance suggesting a 'social distance' of 2m. Research by SOLT and UK Theatre suggests that 70% of theatres will exhaust their financial reserves before the end of 2020.[6] They estimate that 70% of the jobs of the 290,000 workers employed by the venues they represent are at risk of disappearing.[7] In all, Arts Council England research suggests that the UK's Arts and Culture industry in 2019 generated 363,700 jobs and contributed £10.8 billion a year to the UK economy. The threat to the industry is therefore not just measured in terms of jobs, but also in terms of contribution to the economy and to tax income, which is estimated at £23 billion per year.[8]

Outdoor performances were allowed to resume from 11 July 2020 and indoor performances were allowed, with severe restrictions regarding capacity and social distancing, from 1 August.[9] However, with the advent of autumn/winter and the introduction of 'rule of six' legislation on 14 September 2020 in response to a second wave of Covid-19 infections, the ability of theatre companies to generate a reliable income from physical performance is ever more precarious. The Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden's five-stage 'Roadmap' to reopening theatres, published on 25 June 2020, did not name a date for the final stage in which 'performances [are] allowed indoors/outdoors (with a fuller audience indoors)'.[10] As Chris Wiegand explains, '[w]ith the government's job retention scheme set to end on 31 October, theatres now face a period of increased risk during winter, which will be made worse if they do not have sufficient preparation time to stage profitable pantomimes.'[11] The Job Support Scheme that replaces the Job Retention Scheme (or 'Furlough Scheme') is aimed at workers who are on a company's payroll and has no provision for freelance creatives not in employment on 23 September 2020.[12] As a result, it is unlikely to benefit freelancers whose employment is not deemed 'viable' according to the scheme's parameters.

Support for the industry has principally come in two forms: in April, Arts Council England opened up applications for £160m in emergency funding,[13] and in July, the Treasury announced a £1.57bn rescue package of support for the arts aimed at supporting 'national cultural institutions in England and investment in cultural and heritage sites.'[14] Out of that Treasury package, £500m in grants and £275m in repayable finance have to date gone to 'cultural organisations that are at risk of failure because of COVID-19', with a first tranche of £257m paid out on 12 October to organisations throughout England who had applied for grants of under £1m.[15]

4. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51917562
5. https://solt.co.uk/about-london-theatre/press-office/theatre-closures-solt-and-uk-theatre-press-statement/
6. https://www.scribd.com/document/465856625/British-theatre-open-letter#download&from_embed
7. https://solt.co.uk/about-london-theatre/press-office/solt-and-uk-theatre-continue-to-work-with-government-to-find-solutions-for-the-theatre-industry/.
8. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/contribution-arts-and-culture-industry-uk-economy-0
9. https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/theatre-news/west-end-features/how-london-theatres-are-keeping-audiences-safe-during-reopening
10. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/jun/25/government-publishes-roadmap-for-englands-theatres
12. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/921389/Job_Support_Scheme_Factsheet.pdf
13. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid-19/covid-19-response-reset
14. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/157-billion-investment-to-protect-britains-world-class-cultural-arts-and-heritage-institutions
15. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/12/arts-organisations-across-england-to-receive-275m-survival-fund

Yet only £2m overall have been set aside out of the survival package to 'invest in other funds that have been set up to help freelance workers in the arts and culture community, such as technicians, stage managers, artists and performers.'[16] Of the separate Arts Council England funding, just over £3.6m has gone towards individuals working in theatre.[17] Yet freelancers make up almost 50% of the theatre workforce,[18] and are dependent on the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme which is limited in the duration of the support it offers.

Even as the rescue package is skewed towards supporting larger building-based companies in covering their overheads and paying their skeleton staff, many theatres have either had to shut permanently, or are teetering on the brink of financial collapse. Even the largest companies, such as the National Theatre and the RSC, have made substantial cuts, with the National Theatre making 400 casual staff redundant in July and August[19] and the RSC shutting two of its three venues and starting redundancy consultations with permanent staff in October, with 158 jobs at risk.[20] These companies were helped, for a while, by the donations they raised in the first months of the pandemic when they flooded the market with high quality, free-to-view, arts content when they broadcast their back catalogue of theatre broadcasts to house-bound viewers. Large core theatre audiences in this period therefore got used to not only viewing content for free, but also to accepting archival recordings as a substitute for live experiences.

Meanwhile, building-based companies that were able to draw on high-quality archival recordings produced very little new work that created employment for freelancers. It is, for the most part, freelance theatre artists and smaller production companies that have stepped up to produce new work in this period, prompting the 'Offies' Annual Off-West End Awards to create a new 'OnComm Award' to recognise excellence 'of shows from independent, alternative and fringe theatres that are being presented online since March 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.'[21] As Kelsey Jacobson explains, the new made-for-digital theatre work they created during lockdown has 'shown that theatre is patently not tied to theaters: the presence of a public building is not a necessity for performance.'[22]

The Digital Theatre Transformation Case Study examines in detail the approach of one of these companies, Creation Theatre, who have continued to produce live, high-quality work on the Zoom videoconferencing platform and to sell their shows via their online box office. As a result, Creation Theatre have been able to benefit from the Job Retention Scheme and will be able to draw on the Job Support Scheme, thus avoiding redundancies among their permanent staff. They have been able to continue to employ freelance creatives – directors, designers, technicians, performers – paying Equity wages. Their success in adapting to this challenging environment in the wider industry has to be understood in the context of changing attitudes towards the arts and paying for the arts during and after lockdown in the UK.

16 https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/arts-council-england-fund-apply_52085.html
17 https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Data_report_E_R_F_Individuals_Organisations_outside_National_Portfolio_0.pdf, p. 9.
18 https://uktheatre.org/who-we-are-what-we-do/uk-theatre-blog/focus-on-freelancers/
19 https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/03/national-theatre-axe-400-jobs-experts-warn-future-theatre-looks/
20 https://www.stratford-herald.com/112368-rsc-keep-two-three-stratford-theatres-closed-starts-consultation-job-cuts.html
21 https://offies.london/oncomm/
22 https://theconversation.com/theatre-companies-are-pushing-storytelling-boundaries-with-online-audiences-amid-covid-19-141583

The Indigo Survey: contextual audience analysis

The broader context of how audiences have responded to changes in the cultural landscape since lockdown has been mapped out through Indigo's survey of 258 cultural organisations and 103,000 audience members, which gathered responses over six weeks ending on 15 July 2020. Indigo's survey has shown that while 66% of respondents 'would consider attending events if venues re-opened with social distancing', 69% would not consider booking for events for at least another three months. Indigo's research bears out Anne Bonnar and Hillary Keenleyside's suggestion that, 'For performing arts organisations, the immediate threat is not the withdrawal of funding, but earned income disappearing in terms of ticket sales, performance fees and ancillary income.'[23]

The part of the Indigo survey that is most salient in relation to the Digital Theatre Transformation research and Creation Theatre/Big Telly Tempest case study has to do with audience attitudes towards digital performance. The survey finds that while 80% of the 36,990 respondents to this question said they were 'interested in online culture' as a substitute for physical engagement in the arts and 82% (of 33,880 respondents) were concerned about the 'survival of cultural organisations', fewer than half of the respondents to the overall survey would be willing to pay for digital cultural content.[24] Analysing this data, Baker Richards observe that 'Since the start of lockdown, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of frequent arts attenders who have started engaging with culture online, shifting from 25% of those audiences engaging prior to lockdown to 55% engaging since lockdown.'[25] But they also note that 'One of the challenges facing the sector in general is moving from free to paid without losing a growing audience of digital engagers.'[26]

Drilling more deeply into those responses, of the 43,881 respondents who gave details on what type of digital cultural content they would be willing to pay for, 67% said they would be willing to pay for 'A performance specially created to be watched ONLINE', such as the Creation Theatre/Big Telly Tempest. The figure drops to 45% for 'An ARCHIVE recording of a performance with a full audience staged before Coronavirus', but rises to its highest points for 'a LIVE event filmed behind closed doors' (73%) and 'A LIVE event with a socially-distanced audience that I cannot attend in person' (71%). Interestingly, however, when asked for which of these types of performances audiences would be willing to pay the same amount as if it were a physical live performance, the highest figure (15%) is for new made-for-digital work of the type Creation Theatre has produced since lockdown, with the lowest (a mere 3%) reserved for archive recordings of pre-pandemic productions.[27]

Baker Richards' conclusion is both encouraging and alarming:

> 'the good news is there is a considerable audience for digital, at least among frequent cultural attenders, but right now, they're mostly not paying for it . … The proliferation of free content may well have increased reach among digital audiences, but there is a danger that it has set a dangerous precedent going forwards as venues and organisations look to monetize digital content. Our analysis also shows that those who have previously paid for digital content are

23 http://www.b-k.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/BKnewrealitiesMay2020.pdf, p. 3.
24 http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/supercool-indigo/Act-2-Report-wave-2-results.pdf, p. 3.
25 https://www.baker-richards.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/After-the-Interval-Act-II-Analysis.pdf, p. 5.
26 https://www.baker-richards.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/After-the-Interval-Act-II-Analysis.pdf, p. 6.
27 http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/supercool-indigo/Act-2-Report-wave-2-results.pdf, p. 15.

more willing to do so again in future, whereas those who have been consuming for free are less likely.[28]

For Creation Theatre's Chief Executive and Creative Producer Lucy Askew, this situation 'could become an enormous challenge', especially in an environment in which so many companies have habituated audiences to viewing content for free, with optional donations to support the industry. Among the most prominent examples, the National Theatre has been running the 'National Theatre At Home' programme on YouTube with a weekly show since 2 April 2020, with the tagline 'Enjoy world class theatre online for free.'[29] While its stream of One Man, Two Guvnors garnered 937,000 views between the start of the stream at 7.30pm on 2 April and 11am on 3 April and raised more than £50,000 in donations within that time period,[30] by 7.30pm on 9 and 11am on 10 July, the viewing figure for Deep Blue Sea had dropped to just over 59,000 and just over £3,600 were raised through donations,[31] revealing a rapid and dramatic fall in the public's willingness to continue to support the company with donations for archival streams.

There is a marked discrepancy between this concrete evidence of donation fatigue in the current pandemic landscape and the Indigo Survey respondents' stated willingness to pay a little bit more on cultural events once they can happen again 'as normal'.[32] Our research on value for money confirms that when left to decide what to pay for a made-for-digital show, even audience members who highly rate the quality of the performance and who are concerned about the survival of the company pay very significantly less for the work than if they have to purchase a per-device ticket to access that show (see Part 5 of this report).

Baker Richards spell out the implications:

> *'Since only a small proportion of people are willing to pay as much as live for digital, but the majority are willing to pay something, finding that something is crucial. Setting a low anchor price now for digital content could be more costly than offering it for free:*
>
> - *Set the price too low and it could undermine the value of the offer, making it difficult to increase prices in future*
> - *Set the price too high and you risk losing audiences.'*[33]

The Indigo survey finds that 'those respondents whose primary interest is Drama have the highest willingness to pay',[34] while audiences 'whose favourite art form was musicals, comedy, children and

28 https://www.baker-richards.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/After-the-Interval-Act-II-Analysis.pdf, p. 5.

29 https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwo6D4BRDgARIsAA6uN1_4XpNj5FZ9ycOLGwBoX86L8IuNUcrsdY5LBKjwfL1TRKtWheS_-T8aAmrsEALw_wcB

30 https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/coronavirus-209k-households-tune-in-to-watch-national-theatres-one-man-two-guvnors-stream

31 Data from live view of viewing figures and donations on National Theatre At Home's YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw68DjwzexU, 11am on 10 July 2020; the figure for donations in USD is $4550.

32 http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/supercool-indigo/Act-2-Report-wave-2-results.pdf, p. 18.

33 https://www.baker-richards.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/After-the-Interval-Act-II-Analysis.pdf, p. 6.

34 https://www.baker-richards.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/After-the-Interval-Act-II-Analysis.pdf, p. 15.

family work, or popular, folk and world music were more likely to have not engaged with digital content'.[35] Additionally, the Audience Agency's analysis of the Indigo survey concludes that audiences perceive digital performance 'as more of an individual than social activity',[36] with an associated decrease in the willingness to engage with it. Respondents are also crucially concerned with the quality of the digital offer, as 'this, rather than technological challenges, is most commonly what puts off potential audiences. This includes thinking about what can be done in digital that can't be done in live performances'.[37] All this information combined suggests that the 'something' that audiences would be most willing to pay for might be made-for-digital adaptations of drama that include a social or community-building element and that use the digital medium creatively to produce a high-quality offer.

The Digital Theatre Transformation survey on which our own audience research relies examines audience responses to Creation Theatre and Big Telly's Zoom production The Tempest, one of the most successful made-for-digital shows in the UK between April and July 2020. We collected answers during the final phase of the six-week Indigo Survey, between 29 June and 17 July 2020. The overlap between the survey dates makes is possible to directly compare our more focused and granular audience data with the broader data collected by Indigo for the whole arts sector. The 177 responses to our survey, supplemented by 22 in-depth audience interviews, afford a detailed view of how core and new audiences responded to a show which closely matches the parameters of the type of made-for-digital community-building interactive drama offer the Indigo Survey suggests is most likely to be successfully 'monetised' at this point in time.

Many of the responses in the Digital Theatre Transformation study reinforce the findings of the Indigo survey. However, in key areas such as perceived value for money, quality of made-for-digital content and perceptions regarding digital theatre as a community-building environment, our findings diverge, offering a differentiated understanding of a company and audience community who have successfully adapted to digital modes of making and watching theatre. The report therefore sheds light on how high quality made-for-digital theatre can be a route to commercial success and continued employment for a segment of the theatre industry in an environment in which no further bespoke Covid-19-related help from the UK Government is expected for freelance creatives and non-building-based companies.

35 https://www.theaudienceagency.org/asset/2347, p. 4.
36 https://www.theaudienceagency.org/asset/2347, p. 4.
37 https://www.theaudienceagency.org/asset/2347, p. 6.

Creation Theatre

Creation Theatre is Oxford's largest professional producing company, with 9 permanent members of administrative, front of house and leadership staff and 4 Artistic Associates. It was founded in 1996 by David Parrish, is a registered Charity, and is currently headed by Chief Executive and Creative Producer Lucy Askew.The company specialises in performances of classic texts staged in unusual locations in and around Oxford, UK.

Performances are targeted at local family audiences with an age range of 5-95 and often involve interaction with the audience and game-based theatre. The company has produced over 70 shows to date.

Trinculo (Keith Singleton) and Paul Taylor (Caliban) in the 2019 version of The Tempest

Creation Theatre and Big Telly's The Tempest, 2019 vs. 2020

From 19 July – 15 August 2019, Creation Theatre put on The Tempest as a site-specific, immersive production that moved between twelve locations in Osney Mead, an industrial estate on the outskirts of Oxford. It was directed by Zoe Seaton, who herself is the Artistic Director of Big Telly, a theatre company based in Portstewart on the north coast of Northern Ireland specialising in site responsive touring performances and participation projects.

The show was rapidly adapted for Zoom performance at the start of lockdown in 2020, reuniting the director and cast of the 2019 production. Shows ran from 11 April to 10 May after just two weeks of rehearsals with a cast and

technical crew who were entirely new to the Zoom platform. As part of the Digital Theatre Transformation research project, the show was revived for one live performance on 11 July 2020. That performance was recorded and broadcast as a recording the following day, on 12 July 2020. The made-for-digital show involved actors performing either before green screens or

The Ship Captain (Giles Stoakley) in the 2019 version of The Tempest in Osney Mead, with audience

projector screens that conjured up various static and moving vistas from a sea cruise to the buildings and nature on Prospero's island. The show took advantage of the affordances of the medium to, for example, make Caliban be pursued and eaten by a dinosaur on the rampage (a green screen video), or make the drunken Trinculo play with making his wine bottle be 'swallowed up' by the background.

The medium was also exploited for five interspersed moments of interactions with the audience, who could be spotlit to appear on all participants' screens. Audience members were variously cast as reporters interviewing the members of the Neapolitan court and as Ariel's spirits, called upon to help torment the shipwrecked courtiers with noise, pets, and food. At the end of the show, a wedding celebration for Miranda and Ferdinand included the audience in dancing with the bride and groom.

Miranda (Annabelle May Terry) looking for Ferdinand in her garden (pre-recorded)

Ferdinand (Ryan Duncan) and Miranda (Annabelle May Terry) 'touching' (pre-recorded)

Caliban (Paul Taylor) in the jaws of a dinosaur

Only a minimal amount of pre-recorded video footage was used to show Miranda wandering through her garden to find Ferdinand, Miranda reaching her hand through the side of her Zoom frame and a matching female hand entering Ferdinand's Zoom frame and have a ring put on it, and to show the lovers on a screen together in a demonstration of Prospero's magic. At the end of the performance, audiences and performers entered Zoom's Gallery View for the curtain call, as the performers dismantled their green screens to reveal the interiors of their homes and audiences were able to enjoy a moment of unstructured interaction and communality.

Ferdinand (Ryan Duncan) and Miranda (Annabelle May Terry) united (pre-recorded)

Whereas the 2019 production had reached 3,368 individual audience members with summer visitors from 11 countries, in 2020 it reached over 1,200 households in 27 different countries, with a sizable proportion of its audience participating from the USA, Ireland and Canada. Within the UK, too, the digital production had a significantly wider reach, with Oxford-based audiences reducing from 75% of the total audience to a mere 29% and new audiences joining from across the country, with a particular concentration of London audiences (17%) watching the Zoom show (for detailed audience analysis, see Part 5).

The critical and financial success of the production, for which Creation Theatre charged £20 per viewing device for the April-May shows, helped the

company stay open during lockdown and continue to produce new work. Between May and July 2020, Creation Theatre produced Time Machine and a rehearsed reading of Henry VIII (funded by the TORCH Theatres Seed Fund, and presented as part of the Oxford Festival of the Arts),[38] while Big Telly produced Operation Elsewhere and The Machine Stops.

In August 2020, Creation Theatre and Big Telly's co-production Alice, A Virtual Theme Park, which was developed in partnership with tech company Charisma and benefited from Innovate UK funding, garnered critical success in the UK and US. The show won an OnComm Award[39] and was featured on NBC's Today programme. However, despite recommendations by The New York Times and Time Out New York, box office was disappointing, bearing out Audience Agency's research finding that 'children and family work' are among the genres less likely to make traditional theatre audiences engage with digital content.[40] The situation was compounded by the opening up, over August 2020, of the UK economy, the lifting of restrictions on socialising indoors and out, and the incentivising of support for the hospitality sector rather than theatre through the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme.

With autumn and the return of restrictions, as well as a renewed focus on adaptations of Shakespeare, box office receipts have picked up again. Creation Theatre is hosting two-handers produced by associated artists such as Nicholas Osmond and Ryan Duncan's HORATIO! And Hamlet as well as the highly successful The Merry Wives of WhatsApp (dir. Natasha Rickman, adapted and performed by Olivia Maze and Lizzie Hopley). The company is working with Big Telly again on Macbeth, a show designed for the Belfast International Arts Festival and which is also featured in the Creation Theatre programme for October 2020. At the time of writing, Creation Theatre is devising its first Christmas show for Zoom, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz with financial support from the Oxford Local Enterprise Partnership, and programming Romeo and Juliet for February 2021. The company, has also secured Innovate UK funding for a Digital Transformation project to create a new digital performance platform and test it with a repertory company consisting of five freelance performers over six months.

38 https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/event/creation-theatre-explore-henry-viii.
39 https://offies.london/oncomm/.
40 https://www.theaudienceagency.org/asset/2347, p. 4.

Scope and methodology of this research

The observations of practice, recommendations and guidelines in this preliminary report are based on the information gathered through a detailed survey of thirteen members of administrative and creative staff involved in the production of The Tempest between April and July 2020, twelve of whom we subsequently interviewed with follow-up questions. We used responses from the following members of the Creation Theatre/Big Telly team, whose answers also included references to the other digital shows they have been involved in since April 2020:

Creation Theatre and Big Telly's Management and Front of House Team:

    Lucy Askew – Chief Executive and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre

    Zoe Seaton – Artistic Director, Big Telly

    Crissy O'Donovan – Producer

    Emily Walsh – Assistant Marketing Manager

The Tempest Artistic Team and Cast:

    Zoe Seaton – Writer and Director

    Giles Stoakley – Production Manager

    Sinéad Owens – Stage Manager/'Zoom Wizard'

    Al Barclay – Alonzo

    Ryan Duncan – Ferdinand

    Rhodri Lewis – Trinculo

    Madeleine MacMahon – Sebastianne

    Simon Spencer-Hyde – Prospero

    Giles Stoakley – Antonio

    Paul (P.K.) Taylor – Caliban

    Annabelle May Terry – Miranda

The findings regarding audience demographic, behaviours and responses are based on a comparative analysis of audience data obtained by Creation Theatre's box office at the time of booking for the 2019 and 2020 productions of The Tempest. We also draw on the 177 responses to our online survey by audiences of the Zoom Tempest (see Appendix), with 22 of whom we also conducted in-depth Zoom interviews. This data was supplemented by observation of recorded audiences spotlit in 10 recordings of the 2020 Creation Theatre/Big Telly Tempest.

Additional data regarding value for money and willingness to pay for digital content was collected by comparing the box office data for donations collected for the live research performance on 10 July with the donations collected for the broadcast of a recording of that performance.

Research Report

Case Study: Creation Theatre and Big Telly's 2020 digital Tempest

Digital Theatre Transformation, Part 1: Business Model and Changes to the Company's Administration

Changes to company structure and responsibilities

Before the lockdown, Creation Theatre was run from a physical office on in The Mill Arts Centre in Banbury, Oxford. The space was organised as an open-plan space that incorporated a kitchen/prop-and-costume store as well as an open-plan office which accommodated production and education work on one side and marketing and general management on the other side, with all 9 members of the permanent team, including occasional interns, sharing the space. At the start of lockdown, with revenue streams under immediate threat, the company underwent rapid restructuring. Notice was given on the company's Banbury office, which was immediately closed. All administrative staff shifted to working remotely from their homes. The permanent staff base was, at the same time, radically reduced from 9 to 4. Two members of the Education and Marketing team who went on maternity leave were not replaced for the duration of their leave. Two further members of the team (Marketing Manager and Social Media Manager) were furloughed, taking advantage of the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, which continued to pay 80% of their wages.

Until August 2020, the administration of the company was carried out by a skeleton staff from their individual homes working flexible hours and covering multiple briefs. Some of that extra workload and general management work was shouldered by the Chief Executive and Creative Producer, who also became more involved in the everyday running of the company and its creative work. In January, the role of Box Office and Groups Manager broadened to include some of the marketing work and closer ties with the Education Administrator; the job title shifted to Assistant Marketing Manager to reflect the new set of responsibilities. Since lockdown, the role has additionally included box office and group bookings, events, sales analysis, general marketing and design, social media (posting, sharing, thanking, retweeting), audience database management and administrative support for the Chief Executive and Creative Producer. The roles of the Producer and members of the Education team have remained largely unchanged.

Members of this smaller permanent team and the freelancers brought in to work on The Tempest report both working more closely with one another and taking on 'more responsibility … with less consultation' (Giles Stoakley, Production Manager). Those extra responsibilities were consistently framed in responses to interviews as opportunities to acquire new skillsets, with the fact that Creation Theatre is a charity cited as the motivation 'to give a little bit more, and I think it's kind of inevitable in these circumstances that you do give up a bit more time and a bit more energy' (Emily Walsh, Assistant Marketing Manager). The upheaval has also allowed one of the freelance performers on The Tempest to acquire new skills and expand into the roles of producer and writer for a new children's show in collaboration with Creation Theatre.

Changes to the business model
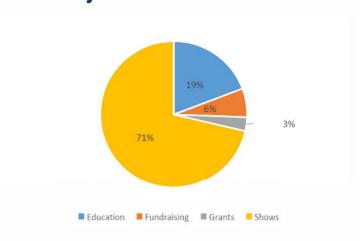
The restructured company we analysed in July 2020 was significantly leaner and required an income of c. £15,000 per month to break even at its stripped-down level; it had also adopted a significantly faster pace of work as a result of its digital transformation. The bulk of the company's income relies on ticket sales and its Education programme with its Holiday Workshops and Drama Clubs, with additional income from contributions to individual shows by the Arts Council and sponsorship, and various tiers of individual and corporate sponsorship. In an ordinary year, the combined income from the ticket sales for the Christmas Show and the Drama Clubs covers the majority of the overheads, so that the company's other activities need only produce a small profit to break even.

The graphs below show the proportion of income from education, fundraising, grants and shows generated between 17 March and 17 July in 2019, a 'normal' year, and in the same time period in 2020, during lockdown. They reveal that during lockdown, the proportion of income generated from education activities and grants has shrunk by 11%, and that 8% more of the company's overall income in 2020 has been generated by ticket sales and 3% more has been generated through its proactive fundraising activities.

2019

2020

- Education   - Fundraising   - Grants   - Shows
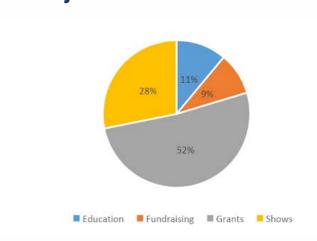
In the four subsequent months, from 18 July 2020 – 18 October 2020, as lockdown eased and UK audiences were incentivised to 'eat out to help out' and encouraged to return to their workplaces, these figures changed quite dramatically as follows:

18 JULY - 18 OCTOBER 2019

■ Education   ■ Fundraising   ■ Grants   ■ Shows

18 JULY - 18 OCTOBER 2020

■ Education   ■ Fundraising   ■ Grants   ■ Shows

What is striking here is not only the drop in the proportion of the income coming from shows and, even more dramatically, education, but also the importance of the grants the company was successful in securing thanks to its digital innovation and partnership work.

In the restructured company, the Drama Club and Holiday Workshops rapidly transitioned to the Zoom platform, where they have become something akin to 'a live TV show that children participate in' (Lucy Askew, CE and Creative Producer). Between 1 July and 1 September 2020, income from those activities decreased by 85%. They nevertheless remain vital to the company's financial survival, with more workshops planned for the October Half Term holiday.

Cost savings have been achieved by cutting all non-essential overheads and by reducing the contractual working hours Creation Theatre's permanent full-time staff. All previously full-time staff have agreed to go down to a four-day week, with a 20% reduction in their pay, reflecting the 32% drop in the company's overall income between 17 March – 17 July 2019 and the same time span in 2020.

The company's survival, reflected in the 8% proportional growth in income generated from ticket sales, also crucially hinges on its ability to keep producing more plays and set up new events. This is where the move to digital production methods is an advantage: not only is it significantly easier and faster to move through the processes of casting, design, rehearsal and performance, but without the expenses caused by travel and accommodation, physical set design, lighting, front of house presence and accommodations for physical access, it is significantly cheaper, too, to capitalise a new show and continue to pay freelance performers an Equity rate of pay.

For The Tempest, which was capitalised on a 'stripped-back survival budget' (Lucy Askew, CE and Creative Producer), the director and the designer agreed to a reduction to their usual fee in recognition of the pressures on the company and absence of the need to travel. The actors were paid the Equity rate, with rehearsals that would normally have been concentrated into a single week spread across two weeks. There was a corresponding reduction in the hours of rehearsal per day and the cast were paid a £100 supplement in recognition of the inconvenience caused by the need to rearrange their households to accommodate the rehearsals and performances.

For subsequent productions, actors have been paid the Equity rate, with an additional £25 per week 'subsistence' contribution to utility bills. With actors no longer needing to travel for work or pay for accommodation away from home, the usual subsistence fee has been dropped.

The squeeze on production costs, combined with the ability of digital shows to sell more of their overall capacity, has allowed the company to generate a small profit from its production of The Tempest and to expect modest profits from its current and future digital theatre work.

Sales Figures for The Tempest	2019: Physical production	2020: Digital production
Ticket price (not discounted):	£25 per person	£20 per device
Tickets sold:	3,368	1,428
Number of customers:	964	1,202
Total income from tickets:	£69,734.40	£27,761.00
Total income from funding:	£32,384	£0
Total expenditure:	£108,616	£12,360.18
Total profit after costs:	£29,420.50	£15,400.82

At the start of lockdown, the company decided to honour all contracts with freelancers employed for scheduled shows and to produce a Zoom version of their 2019 The Tempest. They also decided to continue to charge for their work, albeit at a reduced flat rate of £20 per device, potentially enabling an entire household to watch the show together on one screen.[42] For the physical show in 2019, the rate for a standard ticket had been £25, with a range of discounts available.[43] The rationale for continuing to charge is that Creation Theatre are still producing new work at 'as high a quality as we can physically make it'. Therefore, audiences should be asked to pay for the work and for the live experience of high-quality theatre, which in turn will allow Creation Theatre to 'create a better quality of work for … audiences going forward' (Crissy O'Donovan, Producer).

The reduced rate reflects the pressure on the market brought about by Covid-19 and the more affordable ticket price in turn means that 'digital performances … are selling more of the capacity than our physical shows' (Emily Walsh, Assistant Marketing Manager). The sales figures show a simultaneous increase in the number of paying customers and a simultaneous decrease in the income. This, however, is offset by the reduced overheads for the digital show, which meant that despite the lower overall ticket income, the company was able to make a modest profit from its digital Tempest. As Crissy O'Donovan concludes, 'Making the decision to charge the audience was really good, and it paid off for us.' On the other hand, Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Performer) worries that 'commercially, I think there is a limit to what you can legitimately charge for online theatre, which must make the economics difficult.'

Given the usual reliance of the company's finances on the surplus generated by the Christmas show, Creation Theatre are planning a Christmas show for December 2020 that will build on their experience with digital performance. The company is also looking towards new sources of funding that they can apply for now that they have moved so decisively in the direction of digital innovation and creative partnerships.

42 For the first six performances (11-13 April), the company offered two types of ticket: 'One Device' designed for those watching alone and a slightly more expensive 'Household' ticket for those watching in groups. Following feedback from audiences who felt that it was unfair that those watching in smaller groups were paying the same as those watching in larger groups, the company amended their pricing structure to £20 per device regardless of how many people were watching.
43 A £5 Ticket Offer; a 2 for 1 Tempest deal, Groups discounts (10+1), a discount for "Extra" Club members and discounts for members of sponsor organisations.

At the time of publishing this revised report, the company has very nearly achieved Lucy Askew's (CE and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre) goal, in July 2020, to either 'build up the digital work or get back live or get more funding' in order to be able to return to its pre-Covid-19 size. In August 2020, the company started the process of gradually offering a part-time return to its furloughed staff, increasing workloads as the Job Retention Scheme started to wind down. At the time of writing, Producer Crissy O'Donovan is on a four-month secondment to Big Telly to assist with the production of Macbeth. This creates a professional development opportunity for this member of staff while also easing the financial burden on Creation Theatre at a time when the company is at pains to bring back furloughed members of staff.

By November 2020, the company expects to have all its furloughed staff back at work, with all but Askew back to their former full workloads. The only job role that is expected to shift further as a result of the shift to digital is that of the Front of House and Social Media Manager, as 'front of house' duties have disappeared and social media have changed significantly over the past few months. As Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre) explains: 'It's not quite the same because it used to be about connecting with that physical audience who would physically come to a show.' Now, social media work needs to reach new and virtual audiences across the UK and overseas, and target different time zones and cultural markets with differentiated messaging.

Challenges

The current economic uncertainty, coupled with the risk that audiences may get too habituated to free-to-view theatre work in a market that is flooded with high-quality archival recordings by venues whose funding has been stabilised by the UK Government's package to support arts venues, has created a challenging environment in which to produce new pay-to-view work. Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre) cites 'keeping an audience valuing live theatre and paying for it when so much streamed theatre is free' as one of the main challenges faced by the company.

The company faced potentially significant losses from the cancellation of their physical show The Time Machine at the start of lockdown. Creation Theatre took the decision to transfer the show to the Zoom platform, which allowed the company to cover the bulk of the expenditure on the physical and the digital show, with the remainder covered by Creation Theatre's financial reserves. The company needs to continue generating a regular income through their Education work and an increased rate of production of new shows in order to continue supporting its staff. While The Tempest was produced very quickly and with the lowest possible budget and benefited from the cast having previously performed in the physical show together, Askew is aware of the need for 'the standard and scale of ambition [to] rise'. Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and director, The Tempest) concurs:

> 'I think Zoom theatre is evolving, whereas at the start of lockdown we were just making costumes from what people had in their bedrooms, … now we are more ambitious with the production values I think, and rightly so.'

This is resulting in a corresponding slow-down of the speed of production and an increase in the investment necessary to produce shows that meet the audience's demand for increasingly sophisticated and polished live digital entertainment.

The lockdown has led to changed audience behaviours. Whereas for physical shows, tickets were booked long in advance, giving the company a sense of the level of success they could expect of a show, that booking pattern has radically changed for digital shows, which sell more in the days and even hours leading up to a performance. Knowing what is attractive to an audience is difficult in this context. Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre) identifies the key challenges of getting an audience to understand how digital theatre works before they have tried it, and not letting either the audiences or the creative team be 'restricted in what digital work can be', so as to open up new possibilities as behaviours and technologies evolve.

Changed audience behaviours necessitate an adaptation of the booking processes: to assist audience members in making the digital transition with the company, Emily Walsh (Assistant Marketing Manager) reports a greater need of 'hand-holding' of older and less technologically confident members of the audience. The customer journey from digital marketing through to the actual process of booking tickets online, emails in the run-up to the show and assistance for audience members over email and the Box Office phone line needs to be carefully plotted to offer information and reassurance. Even with this extra support and information in place, there is a spike in emails and calls to the Box Office asking for assistance in the final minutes before the start of each show.

Digital theatre work, and specifically interactive Zoom productions like The Tempest, involves not only staff working from their own homes but also audiences participating from their own homes, into which they allow insight whenever their cameras are switched on. In this context, safeguarding and protecting the privacy of participants in a production is a concern and urgently needs to be addressed through industry-wide guidance and standardisation. Creation Theatre's current solution is to explicitly draw their audience's attention to the need to take an informed decision about whether or not they want to keep their webcams switched on during the performance in both the pre-performance email sent to all bookers and in the introduction to the show itself.

Opportunities

Productivity and expenditure:

The digital transition has significantly increased the productivity of the Creation Theatre team and the speed and efficiency of their work, including their ability to schedule and produce new shows and collaborate with partners in different locations, whether in the UK or abroad. The cost of capitalising a production has been reduced dramatically as the overheads for venue hire, set construction and travel/accommodation have disappeared and the company is no longer held up by venue scheduling and funding cycles in the way it was for physical shows. Not needing to travel has increased the speed with which the team can move through a series of meetings and decisions, while also reducing fatigue and expenditure. As Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and director, The Tempest) notes, one of the benefits of the increased speed of production is that shows can now much more easily be topical and engage with debates while they are still current. For Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre), the speed of production additionally enables the company to do test-runs of smaller shows (like the two-handers The Merry Wives of WhatsApp and HORATIO! And Hamlet) to get a sense of commercial viability before scheduling more performances.

Audience development:

> 'It is a big selling point, if people, if families are in different … locations and can't experience things together, then you can do something that is as close to normality as we can get it whilst remotely or digitally together.' - Emily Walsh, Assistant Marketing Manager

> 'Digital theatre acts as a great leveller where actually everyone can access it in the same way … And actually, the ways to do BSL or captioning, they are there, and that's the next step to make more of the Zoom shows even more accessible'
> - Lucy Askew, CE and Creative Producer

> 'The fact you can access people in their homes makes it more accessible to audiences e.g. if normally they have a gang of kids to get out of the house and shepherd to a theatre, or for carers who struggle to leave home or take those they are caring for to the theatre. […] For family audiences it's so much easier, it takes away so much hassle […] if you […] have this great experience and your kid can be on TV, that brings a new level of excitement.' - Ryan Duncan, Performer

As Part 5 of this report explores in greater depth, while many of Creation Theatre's audiences have continued to support the company, their work has also reached new audiences both in the UK and overseas. It has allowed the company to use its existing audiences to recruit new audiences that would not ordinarily be able to watch the show with them: there is strong evidence to suggest that families and friends in different geographical locations are enjoying the digital shows together from their individual homes. This evidence runs counter to the perception, recorded by The Audience Agency, that digital shows are 'not viewed as sociable experiences (which we know is a key motivation for attendance at live events).'[44] It suggests that Creation Theatre's emphasis on community-building is enabling it to market its shows as sociable experiences, with marketing emails explicit about audiences being able to meet friends and family in the virtual audience.

44 https://www.theaudienceagency.org/asset/2347, p. 22.

It is also notable that the 2020 Zoom Tempest reached a far larger international audience than the 2019 Oxford production. Much of that international audience was located in Anglophone countries, with the majority of audience members outside the UK joining in from the USA, followed by Ireland and Canada, with a total of 10 households participating from as far away as Australia and New Zealand. To maximise access to the show for North American audiences, the company put on a show at 11pm UK time/6pm on the North American East Coast for one performance on 25 April.[45] While adjusting performance times to accommodate different time zones could grow the international Anglophone market, captioning or subtitling would further open up the non-Anglophone international market: there were small numbers of participants from 19 non-Anglophone countries, the majority of which were European and therefore in time zones that are more easily compatible with watching synchronously with UK audiences.

Working digitally has widened the access to shows not just geographically, but also physically. In that sense, digital performance can 'level the playing field' for audiences whose needs are not easily met in physical performance venues (Rhodri Lewis, Performer). As Al Barclay (Performer) noted: 'You think of people who are in nursing home, or people who have limited mobility in one way or another and can't get to the theatre. And yes, they want to be part of a live experience of theatre like they're part of a community that isn't just in that nursing home. … that's an interesting kind of thing that we can push now.'

Younger audiences, too, might benefit more from digital than from physical theatre, if only because, as Ryan Duncan (Performer) points out, the relative cheapness of putting on digital performance rather than as a physical Theatre in Education touring production makes shows more affordable for schools: 'suddenly you don't need to rent a van, you don't need to pay for the transport, you don't need to pay for the actors' time to do that, you don't need to pay for accommodation.' Working through a digital medium allows a company to perform for more than one school in a single day, reducing the cost to the school while still being able to 'pay your actors well.'

However, Creation Theatre have found it more difficult to sell their children's shows Alice: A Virtual Theme Park and Duncan's Up, Up, Up and Away! over the summer than they did their adult shows. Likewise, as the box office figures for drama clubs show, digital drama clubs are very significantly harder to sell than their physical equivalents. This bears out the Audience Agency's conclusion that audiences for 'children and family work' are not currently attracted to digital content.[46] Yet, as survey responses from parents suggest, children do enjoy this content: one audience member of The Tempest volunteered the information that their family, with children aged 6 and 10, 'also enjoyed their imaginative zoom drama classes', while other audience members commented on the joy of seeing how the show engaged the spotlit children in the audience: 'it was lovely to see happy people who had enjoyed themselves. Especially children who might not have experienced Shakespeare before - a nice intro for them.' Performers also noted the extent to which the interactive affordances of Zoom appeal in particular to younger audience members who are excited to see themselves spotlit when they

45 The 11pm performance on 25 April attracted 22 UK bookers, with an additional 23 from the target markets in the United States (19) and Canada (4), 7 from Australia, and 1 each from New Zealand, Ireland and Germany (where it was midnight).
46 https://www.theaudienceagency.org/asset/2347, p. 4.

participate in the show. Therefore, while young audiences and families are clearly a slice of the market to which digital shows might have an intrinsic appeal, and those who have tried the experience appear to have enjoyed it, a lot of marketing work is required to attract this segment of the audience.

Digital performances are intrinsically suitable for neurodiverse audiences and viewers who may normally stay away from a theatre for fear of being disruptive. Anecdotal evidence from post-performance conversations with audience members suggests that audiences with mobility issues have also benefited from being able to participate in live theatre in a digital format. For Creation Theatre, whose physical shows are in unusual, site-specific locations that are challenging in terms of physical access, the digital format has brought with it the opportunity to widen the access to its shows. As such, Zoom performance opens up access to live theatre to groups who are underrepresented in the audiences for building-based performances.

Additional audio-description and captioning could further widen access to live theatre for D/deaf audiences while simultaneously opening up new markets inside and outside the UK for non-native speakers of English who find captions helpful in aiding comprehension of unfamiliar English accents and dialects. For their Christmas show, Creation Theatre are planning to have a performance with either close-captioning or a BSL interpreter, taking advantage of a recent update to the Zoom platform which allows for an interpreter to be visible throughout the show alongside the performers. This will correspond to their usual programming of a 'relaxed performance' as part of a standard Christmas show run.

Finally, digital performance also makes it easier for parents and carers to attend performances without needing to make complicated caring arrangements, especially if companies adopt a more flexible approach to performance times that includes performances that start after children's bedtimes. The Big Telly/Creation Theatre Macbeth's 9.30pm performances have attracted parents of young children who normally struggle to access live theatre. Staggered performance times can thus work to provide increased access not only to viewers in other time zones, but also to viewers with caring responsibilities.

Casting:
Online casting has had multiple benefits for the company and its freelancers: a reduction in travel and expenses, and increased access to work for diverse performers who are no longer limited by geographical distance and pressures of time, finance, and other commitments, allowing both Creation Theatre and Big Telly to be yet more inclusive and diverse in their casts. As Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and director, The Tempest) points out in relation to the casts she normally works with from her base in Northern Ireland: 'there's a very very small number of professional artists based in Belfast, which is where we draw most of our casting from, who come from diverse communities so … we haven't always been able to have a very diverse cast, whereas now, that's easier.' The change has been perceptible in the casting for Big Telly and Creation Theatre's co-production of Alice, as performer Annabelle May Terry points out:

> 'I believe this way of working is more accessible and inclusive as it's
> available to anyone and everyone at any time. I had the privilege of
> sitting in on Creation's Alice auditions in which they were actively
> seeking to diversify their casting and broaden their pool of actors of

colour. It was wonderful to see so many performers getting the opportunity to showcase their talent to the company and be cast in the show as a result.'

Using videoconferencing for casting therefore enables what Annabelle May Terry (Performer, The Tempest) dubs 'virtual equality' in an environment with a level playing field for previously disadvantaged performers.

With the #BlackLivesMatter movement that reached a new peak in the midst of the pandemic, Creation Theatre have now redoubled their efforts to seize this moment, which combines a high level of availability of diverse talent with a new irrelevance of geographical boundaries, to diversify the casts of their shows. Black performers have played the lead roles as Anne Boleyn and Catherine of Aragon in Henry VIII, Alice in Alice: A Virtual Theme Park and Dorothy in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Askew recognises the importance of children seeing that those leading roles are open to be performed by performers of any racial or ethnic background, as this form of role modelling should encourage more diversity in the acting profession for the next generation. The company is therefore actively working to diversify its casts and thinking about how to also have more diversity in the casting panels.

Networks and creative partnerships:
Digital working has vastly expanded the range of people and partner organisations Creation Theatre and Big Telly are now able to engage with. As Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly, and director of The Tempest) says, 'we have more access to other people than we would have done before, like other universities and other theatre companies, other venues, other artists… There are huge advantages to that, and I'm talking to artists all the time now in New York and LA and Australia and Munich and Oxford and that's fantastic, it's a real positive.' As a result of these new connections, Creation Theatre and Big Telly's current production of Alice is being created in partnership with tech company charisma.ai (https://charisma.ai/), whom Seaton describes as 'a natural fit' because 'they were interested in our kind of live immersive interactive storytelling and we were interested in their technical skill and ability to work with bigger audiences.'

Funding:
The company's digital transformation has opened up new avenues for funding that is geared towards creative partnerships, local enterprise, gaming and digital innovation in addition to traditional sources of funding such as Arts Council England. Creation Theatre and Big Telly's current partnership with charisma.ai, for example, has opened up access to the tech partner's Innovate UK funding stream and to funding from Future Screens NI (which Northern Irish Big Telly is eligible for). This, Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre) recognises, 'is indicative of the fact that there's a whole load of funding and support that is geared at tech industries and gaming and innovation that normally theatres wouldn't even consider looking at.' Further funding for the company's digital Christmas show The Wonderful Wizard of Oz has come in the shape of support by the Oxford Local Enterprise Partnerships. The company's digital innovation was key to their success in accessing this new source of financial support.

Most recently, Creation Theatre and charisma.ai have built on their success in unlocking funding to create Alice, A Virtual Theme Park with a second successful bid for funds. They have secured £165,000 in public funding for a Digital Transformation project in 2020-21 that will involve the development of a bespoke digital performance platform and the ability to road-test that platform with a repertory company of five freelance performers employed over a period of six months.

Looking ahead:

In the winter 2020/2021 season, Creation Theatre will continue to produce digital shows, even as other companies are returning to in-person activities in buildings. With The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, their Christmas show, the company will raise the per-device ticket price to £30 to reflect the size of the cast and the expense of producing a high-quality digital show. Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre), sees this continued focus on digital rather than physical performance at this time as part and parcel of Creation Theatre's fundamental identity as primarily concerned with making theatre rather than focusing on making a building safe for creative staff and audiences:

> *'we're a creative company and we don't want our team to be spending most of their time marking things out on the floor and cleaning things. That's not what we do. I actually think what we would be able to deliver would be [...]an inferior experience to what we can deliver online.'*

This is true both for holiday club and term-time educational activities and for new productions. For Askew, the key challenge lies in communicating the value of the digital work to parents and audiences. The expectation is that the combined forces of winter and the 'rule of six' legislation will encourage audiences and parents to take up a digital offer that connects them with other participants across geographical divides and that does not require the physical effort (and carbon footprint) of driving to a location for an educational or theatrical event while staying safe during the pandemic.

Taking advantage of the speed with which it is now able to operate to programme and produce new shows, the company is, in the medium term, also shifting ever more towards a more 'continental model' of producing work with a repertory company of five actors funded by non-Arts Council funding to develop and test the new performance platform. That same funding will also support Creation Theatre's development, in partnership with tech company charisma.ai, of their bespoke performance platform. Having a company to work with over a six-month period will enable Creation Theatre to put on two major digital shows and additionally to produce smaller pieces that use the platform as a digital theatre.

As a result, the company will be able to continue doing the type of programming they have begun to do with Merry Wives of WhatsApp and HORATIO! And Hamlet, whereby a short initial run enables Creation Theatre to judge the commercial potential of a new show and to host further performances if there is a large enough audience for the show. In the current crisis, in which Creation Theatre's Board is unable to take on further financial risks, those shows are financed by the freelance creatives who put them together. They are sold through the Creation Theatre Box Office and marketed by the company, which also gives the freelancers access to technical support with Zoom. All Box Office income up to the amount that allows the freelancers to break even goes to the creatives, and it is only once the cost of the production has been covered that Creation Theatre takes a cut of the profits. The system, as Askew puts it, is 'a happy compromise solution that keeps work going out and keeps the audience entertained, as well'. She is hopeful that soon Creation Theatre will be able to guarantee an income for freelancers who use the company as a virtual receiving venue.

Instead of planning solid, non-extendable runs, therefore, the company is moving towards a mode of working that allows for shorter runs and revivals that make it possible for several shows to remain in the overall repertoire over a longer period of time, with a mix of shows produced by the company and

shows for which it acts as a virtual receiving venue. Since performers, in this flexible way of working, do not have to be physically co-present to revive a show, it will be feasible, diary clashes permitting, to bring them back to perform in a revival even if they are engaged in work commitments elsewhere. As Askew explains, this operational model is influenced by her conversations with Creation Theatre's founder, David Parrish, who is now working as a Producer for the National Theatre of Norway:

> *"In the UK, we say it's a six-week run at the beginning, and then it's very difficult to extend it. Whereas what you do in Norwasy is you maybe have three shows that are reaching two weeks and you see which one is the most popular and then you keep that one going and you drop the one that's not. And it's more of a Rep company.*
>
> *At the time, I thought there was no way we can do that. It's too ingrained in availability of actors; it's really hard negotiating with agents, and it just wouldn't be possible. But this [digital mode of working] actually opens it up. It's quick to make the work. And also the fact that actors are more available at the moment, which obviously […] hopefully won't last. […] There's an opportunity there."*

Longer-term, the shift to digital shows has been so successful that Creation Theatre anticipate that they will continue producing digital work on their own platform or 'digital theatre' venue alongside physical shows even after the pandemic has subsided, so as to continue growing its digital audience. Some shows will be planned from the start in both physical and digital formats. Askew is also considering the option of introducing a 'digital season' in addition to the physical shows, to fall into a part of the year when audiences are less likely to want to travel to a venue or watch site-specific work outdoors.

The benefits from remote working for the company's administrative staff have been such that the company anticipates that even after Covid-related restrictions on movement and social interaction are relaxed, meetings will continue to be mostly held online and that members of the team will continue to work remotely. With Creation Theatre's new partners charisma.ai, Askew is keen to continue exploring what the digital medium allows creatives to do that is not possible in physical theatre.

Digital Theatre Transformation, Part 2:
Understanding the impact of shift to online working for Creation Theatre staff

Equipment requirements

The shift to home working has necessitated all employees to use their private mobile telephone and laptop or PC for work, to have a webcam, and to have a work space and secure internet connection in their home. More recently, the company has also equipped workers who needed to improve their office set-ups at home with desks, chairs, monitors, and other office equipment.

Workflows and Processes

All meetings have moved online as a matter of course, and this is a practice that is likely to continue beyond the Covid-19 period, as it has been a key means of cutting down on travel, with savings on time, money and environmental cost (see Environmental Gains, below). Despite the increase in the workload for individuals, there has been no significant change in the overall number of hours worked. Working patterns have become much more flexible to fit around specific tasks (e.g. supporting a performance) and individual needs and household set-ups.

Several members of the team report that the change to digital modes of working not only on the administration and organisation of a company and its shows but on the show itself has led to an increased ability for members of staff who need to have some oversight of creative processes to be at hand to contribute to those processes when needed, without the delays that characterise the work on a physical production. Digital working enables multi-tasking. Key figures (Creative Producer, Production Manager, Stage Manager) are able to work on organisational tasks while also being available to drop in on Zoom rehearsals. The ability to switch webcams off while listening into a discussion allows for a more discreet presence in the virtual rehearsal room than would be possible in a physical space. That, in turn, enables Production Manager and Deputy Stage Manager to trouble-shoot and Chief Executive and Creative Producer Lucy Askew to keep a 'top level awareness of the conversations going on and how the work is developing' and to be closer to the cast, whom she regularly joins at the beginning and at the end of each performance. That closeness is key at a time when performers are adapting to new ways of working and she needs to be at hand to know 'how they're all feeling, and also supporting their mental health in lockdown.' It also enables Askew, along with Video Designer Stuart Read, to help out with the technical aspects of the production and feed into the audio-visual work (pre-recorded video content and virtual backgrounds).

Online working also facilitates Chief Executive and Creative Producer Lucy Askew's remote participation in front of house activities before and after each show to greet the audience, introduce the show and, at the end of it, open up the show for applause, further information and informal exchanges. For her, the fact that 'we know our audiences really well' has been an important factor in the company's regular audiences returning to see their digital work. Askew explains:

Lucy Askew greeting her audience at the end of the show

> *'Even on a normal show, even though I wouldn't be there as much, I will go to the Front of the House to meet the audience and talk to the audience and see the audience as much as I can. So for me it's been quite an important part of our development is to see the audience every night.'*

Seeing who is in the audience and how audiences respond to the digital work enables her to gage the success of the show along with its ability to continue engaging the company's regular audiences while reaching out to a new audience base (see Part 5 of this report).

Behavioural changes

For Creation's staff, the change to home working has involved greatly increased flexibility in working hours, which now extend to include supporting performances as they happen. This is offset by no longer needing to travel to work and the benefits of being able to organise workloads more independently and fit work around other commitments. This has benefits for the work/life balance of members of staff who have young families and caring responsibilities, but it has also involved staff having to be much more careful to take regular breaks and get some exercise.

> *'Due to my home circumstances (juggling childcare) I have to be slightly more flexible with my working hours. … There are positives to this too of course. … I don't have to travel to London and Oxford for production meetings/auditions etc. We are successfully navigating these on Zoom and everyone's time is used more efficiently. … so although I miss a coffee with colleagues and the likes, I don't miss the office structure.'* – **Crissy O'Donovan, Producer**

> *'Being able to cook and relax on lunch breaks in your own home is a huge benefit …. As my living and working space have merged, I have often found it difficult to 'clock off' and stop thinking about work at the end of the day and on days off. I have stored my work diary and laptop in a cupboard and planned after work activities such as running, cooking, cycling to be able to maintain a work/life balance.'*
> – **Emily Walsh, Assistant Marketing Manager**

'The digital element and being at home makes it easier to maintain some element of work/life balance. Overall I feel online work and working from home has been very beneficial for my wellbeing.' – Lucy Askew, CE and Creative Producer

Members of staff also reported consciously making the choice to take on extra work and not be too concerned about their work/life balance at present. As Lucy Askew put it: 'It's very difficult for anything else to feel important when the stakes are so high for so many people.'

Generally, Creation Theatre staff reported higher levels of concentration and productivity in themselves and their co-workers since shifting to home-working, with Emily Walsh (Assistant Marketing Manager) reporting: 'I have been able to focus on writing content for the website, emails etc. much more quickly, easily and successfully at home, and generally feeling like I get more work completed.' Members of staff cite the absence of travel, of interruptions and the ability to multi-task in a digital workplace as key factors that increased their productivity.

Environmental gains

Moving to exclusively digital marketing strategies has obviated the need for printed leaflets, posters, and banners, with a large reduction in the use of paper and printing. Staff no longer travel to work. This, depending on their job role and need to attend casting sessions and production meetings in various parts of the country, makes a significant difference (especially when the collaboration between Northern Irish Big Telly and English Creation Theatre for The Tempest is taken into account, which involves flights). Staff also generate less waste packaging from meals and drinks consumed during the working day.

'I'm even considering getting rid of my car, and much easier to take the time to peg washing out to dry instead of using the tumble dryer!' – Lucy Askew, CE and Creative Producer

The energy consumption gains from no longer running a physical office in Oxford are offset by the extra energy consumption generated by all staff working in their individual homes.

Challenges

The main challenges in the shift to digital work for Creation Theatre's permanent core team had to do with maintaining a work/life balance when the physical and temporal boundaries between the two are blurred, and the fact that they miss informal chats with colleagues and the ease with which some problems are dealt with in an office setting in which informal communication is the norm.

For Lucy Askew, an additional challenge has been that it is 'harder to have conversations with the audience outside of the shows', a problem she counters by engaging with remote audience she recognises as regular attendants after the shows and by making sure she is highly visible both before and after the end of each show. This helps in continuing to build 'that personal connection to the company' and provide the audience with 'a sort of anchor point where they go 'this is Creation' and it is a sort of personal thing.' To maintain a personal relationship with The Time Machine's sponsors, furthermore, Creation Theatre set up a breakout room for them at the end of a show.

Opportunities

All Creation Theatre staff with organisational responsibilities who replied to our questionnaire reported that overall, the move to working online had been a 'mostly positive experience, with some challenges but also positive changes'.[47] Staff reported reduced fatigue from travel, increased ability to combine work with childcare, increased productivity and the ability to multi-task and be more involved in the creative aspects of the organisation, in rehearsals and in the running of shows.

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47 Answer to the questionnaire question: "How do you rate the change to your work patterns resulting from the move online?", which allowed the following responses:
1 = very difficult, very negative experience
2 = difficult, mostly negative experience
3 = not that different from my normal experience of work
4 = a mostly positive experience, with some challenges but also positive changes
5 = a highly positive experience, work has become easier.

Digital Theatre Transformation, Part 3: Making Digital Theatre

A key component of the company's digital transformation was its rapid shift from an analogue mode of making theatre to a digital mode. In part, this was facilitated by the fact that neither Creation Theatre nor Big Telly own their own venue but specialise in putting on immersive, site-specific and promenade performances in found indoor spaces and outdoor locations. For Al Barclay (Performer), there is a clear connection between the company's specialism in site-specific theatre and the ease of digital transformation:
'Creation don't have a building... so they immediately shifted because of course they make [theatre] wherever, so they made it online, that's their new building... It is "adapt or die", we're at that stage, unfortunately.'

The transition was also made easier by the intrinsic adaptability of the company's permanent staff and the freelancers it employs. Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Performer) explains:
'Theatre is great at evolution. Because you tend to combine a set of people who are … open to new ideas, who are creative and open to trying things, and from a technical point of view, are very committed to improvisation and working quickly. So I suppose we're … an ideal industry to move this forward.'

Paul Taylor (Performer) concurs: 'The skill of having to adapt so quickly is not a new skill to actors or directors, because we have that as a soft skill anyway.' Even so, members of the company and its performers are aware of being one of the first companies to have managed a complete digital transformation of both the administrative and the creative sides of the business. Annabelle May Terry, who played Miranda in The Tempest and has since been involved in Alice, expresses a widespread view within the team when she says that Creation 'do really feel like pioneers and it did feel like that even when we were doing the Tempest right at the beginning it felt like we were part of something amazing and the next, a new genre almost.'

That sense of the being pioneers who are just beginning to understand the creative potential of digital theatre is echoed by Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer), for whom the company's creative work with Zoom is 'moving into a territory which is as much live film or as much live gaming as it is theatre.' Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and director, The Tempest and Alice) concurs: 'it's looking at what we can do on Zoom that we can't do in the real world […] and that feels like we are finding a new art form rather than an old one.' Askew is keen not to see their work defined as, and thereby limited to, 'Zoom theatre'. She prefers to describe their work as 'digital theatre', which allows for

'a whole palette of possibilities that we can play with […] a kind of spectrum of things we can draw in and learn from and we can meld together, but that means that there's space within that for wildly different levels of interactivity, there's space within that for wildly different levels for how an audience experiences that, of whether they're seen or not seen and what their position is within that experience.'

This is an important caveat to bear in mind for readers of this report which, with its focus on the performance on Zoom of the 2020 Tempest, is necessarily concerned primarily with how Creation Theatre in collaboration with Big Telly adapted the Zoom platform for performance.

Alice: A Virtual Theme Park included audiences designing their own hedgehog avatar on their mobile phones and using their drawing to play a game. With their development of a new performance platform in 2020-21, Creation Theatre are creating a bespoke 'digital theatre' venue that will enable them to continue with such experimentation with the medium.

Workflows and processes

Just as the administration of the company entirely moved to online communication via email, telephone and videoconferencing, the creative side of the company's work also moved to remote ways of working and communicating. This could, at times, lead to additional delays in decision-making. On the whole, however, this led to an acceleration in the speed of the creative work, as Producer, Creative Producer, Production Manager and Stage Manager could more easily be virtually present during rehearsals while also working on their other tasks and could therefore often answer questions and work on solutions within a rehearsal rather than between rehearsals. As Sinéad Owens (Stage Manager) put it: 'Because you're working on your computer already, it's much quicker to do the things that need to be done.'

Shifts in responsibilities

The economic pressures on the company meant that The Tempest was produced with the lowest possible number of creative staff. The 2019 physical production's creative team of seven (Adaptor/director, Designer, Sound Designer, Lighting Designer, Video Designer, Stage Manager, Production Manager) was shrunk to a core team of four for the digital production, which no longer needed a physical set and could be created without needing individuals in exclusive charge of sound and lighting design. For the 2020 Zoom Tempest, the team consisted of Adaptor/Director Zoe Seaton, Designer Ryan Dawson Laight, Stage Manager Sinéad Owens, and Production Manager Giles Stoakley, with occasional assistance from the original production's Video Designer Stuart Read, who helped out with the digital show's pre-recorded video footage of Miranda and Ferdinand which presented the illusion of Miranda and Ferdinand sharing a screen as an effect of Prospero's magic.

The transition to digital, and the concomitant reduction in the size of the creative team, resulted in the following shifts in their roles and responsibilities:

Director: For Zoe Seaton, the show's director (and Big Telly's Artistic Director), the changes were confined to the modes of working rather than her role and responsibilities, although she also reported feeling 'more involved across the whole business.'

Designer: for The Tempest, much of the designer's job was to do with working with the performers individually on their costume design and the adaptation of their existing wardrobe for the purposes of the production. Performers had to provide him with measurements and costume fittings were done via Zoom, with the designer guiding the performers to adapt their own clothes where possible, with additional items (costumes and properties) mailed to them. With no physical set to construct, the designer became responsible for suggesting the aesthetic for the digital backdrops.

Sinéad Owens (Stage Manager) describes this as being 'like doing a mood board in the real theatre world, but he was able to just give pictures of the things that he wanted and then we would put those in as the background.' The designer also guided one member of the cast, who had been unable to use green screen or projection technologies, through assembling the props and décor needed to effect the conversion of a cupboard into their character's den for the performance.

Production Manager: this role expanded and shifted significantly. For the 2019 Tempest, the production manager had been in charge of allocating and overseeing budgets and, taking over some of the traditional roles of the stage manager, had helped with the building and striking of the physical set, carrying out major repairs on it and checking of its safety throughout the run. For the 2020 digital production, the role became much more technical. Giles Stoakley (production manager) describes his work on the Zoom production as 'just monitoring things' and as being there in rehearsals to ensure the financial and technical feasibility of ideas. This does not, however, lead to a reduction in the production manager's workload, as

> 'the other stuff becomes much more difficult, just because you can't access people, because it's incredibly difficult to teach an actor who isn't technological and has no basis of knowledge of this, to use a relatively complicated software programme and to not only teach it to them, but to teach it to them remotely.'

The production manager's remit on The Tempest also extended to organising the logistics of shipping costumes, props, and elements of set design to performers' homes and organise their return at the end of the run, and to thinking through the impact of rehearsals and performances on performers' lives and the people with whom they shared their homes. New strategies had to be devised for remote risk assessments of performers' home studio sets, and new challenges arose to square the production's budget with performers' needs for loans of tech equipment (see 'Equipment Requirements' below).

Stage Manager: This is the role which underwent the most significant shift. All physical aspects of the role were dropped and made way for an entirely technical role which combined 'elements of television producer and Deputy Stage Manager' (Giles Stoakley, Production Manager). The change brought with it opportunities to work with a new set of people and 'huge opportunities to upskill as a result of working online' (Sinéad Owens, Stage Manager). The process of technical upskilling involved taking online tutorials on how to use the Zoom platform, a lot of 'playing around' with the software, as well as experiments in and between rehearsals to work out the platform's compatibility with other types of software that could amplify Zoom's affordances and adapt it for performance. With the shift in the Stage Manager's role came a tongue-in-cheek re-naming of Sinéad Owens' credit for the Zoom Tempest, which identified her as 'Zoom Wizard'.

> 'I started being mentioned in reviews for the first time ever. All the shows I've ever done on stage, stage managing in theatres, and stage managers never get mentioned. And then we did it on Zoom and people starting mentioning the stage manager – it's so weird!' – **Sinéad Owens, Stage Manager**

Much of the work of the Stage Manager on Zoom involves live vision mixing, using the platform's 'spotlighting' function to select which screen to show to the audience. When all performers are

designated 'co-hosts' for the Zoom call, they are automatically presented at the top of the list of call participants, making it easier for the Stage Manager to find and spotlight them on cue. A function that was available in April/May 2020 but which has since been disabled by the platform was the ability of the Zoom host
to mute and unmute the audience; by July 2020, the ability to unmute has been disabled as a safeguarding measure to prevent eavesdropping on participants without their consent. For The Tempest's moments of audience interaction that involved the collective creation of sound effects by all participants (e.g. the rain of the opening tempest, or the cry of the birds pursuing the shipwrecked courtiers), the Stage Manager was responsible for unmuting and muting audience microphones and spotlighting and thus integrating in the production members of the audience who were participating with particular enthusiasm.

The Stage Manager was also responsible for operating the sound effects for the show. Because Zoom is designed as a videoconferencing platform, it privileges the sound of the human voice over other sounds, which presents challenges for the use of music and other sound effects. The platform is also designed to automatically spotlight whoever is speaking, so that unmuted performers could, by making a noise before starting to speak their next line, have their screen spotlit without the Stage Manager's input, making it possible for the Stage Manager to work on other cues in the background. The Stage Manager furthermore was in charge of spotlighting whoever was not speaking but was either listening to the speaker and responding in interesting way or doing something else to which the audience needed to pay attention.

The additional requirements regarding sound and vision mixing were effected by using pieces of software that were compatible with Zoom. Vision mixing was done by using ManyCam, which Zoom recognises as one of the camera options and which allows the Stage Manager and performers to switch between the different cameras of individual performers (where applicable).[48] For sound, the company settled on QLab, which was operated as QLab Remote via the Stage Manager's smartphone. This was connected to Zoom on her laptop through the use of a shared IP address, allowing the Stage Manager to spotlight a performer on the Zoom screen while also cueing sound via QLab Remote. For sound editing, Owens used Adobe audition, which allowed her to feed in sound effects even during rehearsals.

Throughout, the Stage Manager maintained her normal role of people management within the creative team, looking after the performers' welfare and acting as a go-between between the actors and the company. This was more challenging without face-to-face conversations and opportunities, in the margins of rehearsals, to catch up with individual performers. On Zoom, Owens finds 'it's hard to gage whether people are being involved' and additional structures need to be put in place to ensure that performers do report and discuss whatever issues may be affecting them.

Performers: The digital setting also affected the responsibilities of the performers, who, guided by the Production Manager and Stage Manager, had to convert a part of their home into a studio set and learn a set of new technical and cognitive skills (see 'skills set requirements' below) in order to operate their equipment during rehearsals and performances. Guided by the Designer, performers were also

48 In addition to ManyCam (https://manycam.com/), OBS (https://obsproject.com/) and vMix (https://www.vmix.com/) were used by various members of the team.

required to take their own costume measurements, adapt costumes, and assist in the sourcing of props by using suitable items they had in their homes. The move to digital forms of working therefore meant an expansion of the performer's role to work more closely with the creative team to co-produce elements of the design and technological solutions; it also involved a decrease in their responsibility for managing the audience during and after performances.

Casting

Save for one performer (Rhodri Lewis, who stepped into the role of Trinculo), the cast for the 2020 The Tempest was drawn from the same pool of actors who had previously been part of the 2019 production. Two roles (the Captain and Head of Security) were dropped, which resulted Giles Stoakley slotting into the role of Antonio. The cast were selected for their fit for the role rather than their technical abilities and set-ups. Since then, all of Creation's digital shows have used videoconferencing for auditions and have taken no account of performers' technical limitations but cast the best performer for the role, on the assumption that the company would be able to supply whatever technological upgrades were needed by an individual performer.

> 'Creation are really committed… that you can't cast people on their technical limitations.' – **Giles Stoakley, Production Manager and Performer**

> 'We're not doing a demonstration of Zoom wizardry, we're telling a story. Some kind of technical skill can be helpful because it'll make people feel freer to be playful I think but I think it's the kind of people who want to write their own show or have already done this or have devised something, I think those actors thrive really well and they go away after rehearsal and come in and go "I've got a yoghurt pot and a toilet roll does it look like a gas mask?" and they are genuinely investigating the medium and those are the people.' – **Zoe Seaton, Artistic Director of Big Telly and Director of The Tempest**

For more information regarding Creation Theatre's current approach to diversity and access in casting, see the section on Casting in Part 1, Section 4 of this report.

Equipment requirements

Many members of the creative team have needed to either upgrade their broadband connection or to get additional mobile phone data, to transfer from their WiFi or broadband connection to their smartphone in the event of connection issues.

Additionally, members of the creative team had the following equipment needs:

Stage Manager:
Computing Hardware: laptop, smartphone, monitor.
Computing Software and Applications: Zoom, QLab, ManyCam, Adobe Audition, WhatsApp

Performers:

<u>Computing Hardware</u>: laptop or PC,[49] smartphone, monitor,[50] webcam(s) (if not integrated in laptop or PC, or if more than one camera angle is required), podcast microphone (if not integrated in laptop or PC), GoPro remote control (if performance requires distance from the laptop/PC).

<u>Computing Software and Applications</u>: Zoom, WhatsApp

<u>Other equipment</u>: Soft box lights to light the green screen(s), LED lights, green screen(s), blackout curtains or panels.

Skills set and training requirements

The main responsibility for learning to use Zoom and its compatibility with QLab and ManyCam lay with the Stage Manager (for the Stage Manager's Skills Sets, see 'Shifts in Responsibilities' above). All members of the team had to learn to use the platform, guided in part by online tutorials and in part by the Stage Manager and the Production Manager as well as other members of the team.

> *'We just got very used to zoom in the first few days of rehearsals and navigated it together.'* – **Madeleine McMahon, Performer**

> *'We learnt as we went through the first ever rehearsals we had for the The Tempest. We learnt through trial and error and from one another.'* – **Annabelle May Terry, Performer**

Again with guidance from Production Manager and Stage Manager, performers had to set up a studio in their homes, with green screens, repurposed lights owned by the performers, soft box lights, and microphones, and they had to learn to operate that equipment. Performers were required to be able to learn the commands on the Zoom platform and be able to set up and change their chroma key backgrounds on cue. [51] Some performers additionally learned to edit videos for their backgrounds and to use ManyCam so as to be able to switch between more than one webcam within their individual home studio set, or switch between backgrounds.

In addition, performers had to adapt their performance style to Zoom, which involved learning to look into the camera rather than the screen, using depth within the shot while keeping at least a one-metre distance from the green screen to avoid casting a shadow onto the screen. Coming in on their cues more rapidly than would feel appropriate on stage was a strategy performers developed to cover up connectivity lags. Some of the performers report using skills that they had learned when acting for television, reducing the size of their performance to fit the medium and matching their eyelines with those of other performers.
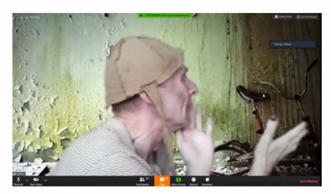
49 For Zoom's specifications for static or moving virtual backgrounds, see https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360043484511-System-requirements-for-Virtual-Background. Note that the way Zoom is set up for iPad tablets restricts gallery view in a way performers have found difficult to work with. On The Tempest, one of the performers was working with a device that did not have the specifications needed for chroma key/virtual backgrounds; the solution was to use a projector to create the backgrounds for this performer's scenes.

50 The size of monitor is an important factor: the larger, the easier it is to see the faces of other performers and the audience, making the job of the performer easier. Note that Zoom can be set up to split the screen between two monitors, with one monitor on "Speaker View" and the other on "Gallery View", making it possible for performers to keep an eye on the rest of the cast and the audience while performing a scene.

51 For The Tempest, performers were still required to change their own backgrounds. This is now no longer a necessity, as ManyCam and V-mix software allow the Stage Manager to operate background changes remotely.

Eyeline matches between Trinculo (Rhodri Lewis) and Caliban (Paul Taylor)

As Madeleine McMahon (Performer) put it:

'telling a story on this level a performance can quite quickly look quite large and over the top, but if you were to do it this size in the middle of the Olivier theatre, it would seem a very small character. So you're paring down the way that you perform the character while at the same time being aware that the interactive nature that the director wanted was for a theatre crowd.'

For Rhodri Lewis (Performer), acting for a laptop camera can create a sense of 'intimacy' and facilitate Shakespearean asides directly to the audience. Performers had to become their own director of photography to check their lighting, framing and camera angle. They also had to learn to be sufficiently quiet when it was not their turn to be spotlit to avoid accidentally 'pulling focus' and being spotlit automatically. Conversely, when required, they had to get used to starting their lines with a plausible sound (such as clearing their throat) in order to trigger being spotlit in time for the beginning of their actual line. Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Peformer) sums it up as: 'Just wrestling with Zoom is a skill in itself but we have all learned a completely new style of acting that is a curious combination of screen and stage acting.'

'If you're in a scene with somebody, or speaking to somebody else over here potentially and then if you cut to them and see where their eyeline is […] After doing that I discovered that actually, in film and TV there is a person whose job it is to do that, in film especially, there is a person on set and that's their job, to work out those eyelines and making sure that you're looking in the right place and stuff. It's just interesting […] to play with that but you don't normally get the opportunity to do that, but because we are rehearsing, because we take the time to do it – in theatre you rehearse quite a bit compared to TV - you were able to spend time doing that, seeing what difference that makes and suddenly if you're in a scene or you're doing something, especially if you're doing Shakespeare then you have an aside and suddenly the aside is right there in the screen, it sort of really changes it.' – **Rhodri Lewis, Performer**

'90% of our communication is non-audible so it's not the stuff that we say but the way we say it and our body language. On Zoom, you're not getting all of that so people are doing a lot more nodding and going ooh and ahh and in a normal setting we would usually take all of that information in, all in one go in a big circle of people, when everybody is a little square you feel like you have to make that clearer, going yes I'm agreeing with you, good idea. It can be quite tiring actually.' – **Madeleine McMahon, Performer**

Most performers commented on the additional cognitive demands of this mode of performance, although some also recognise that it is not intrinsically different from the multi-tasking required when speaking a line while hitting a mark on stage and handling a prop. Zoom theatre requires actors to perform for a camera while also discreetly getting ready for the next technical cue to mute or unmute themselves, change their own chroma key background, or trigger being spotlit automatically by making a sound while unmuted. All the while, performers also need to keep an eye on the team's WhatsApp group chat to check whether another performer is having connectivity issues and needs someone to improvise to cover the glitch while it is being resolved.

Improvisation of that kind was called upon in several performances in which a performer's internet connection was unstable or a microphone had accidentally left muted, prompting another performer to intervene with '"It sounds like you're saying to me…" and then exactly saying [the muted performer's] line' (Al Barclay, Performer), or, as happened in Henry VIII, to come up with a pastiche of meta-Zoomic Shakespearean English such as 'Sirrah, unmute thy microphone!'.

Designing for Zoom

Whereas the design for The Tempest relied on what the creative team could quickly throw together by combining virtual and projected backgrounds with home-sourced props and costumes, design is probably the area in which the most rapid developments are taking place. For Alice, Creation Theatre and Big Telly are working with partner charisma. ai to create an immersive digital experience that involves the illusion of disappearing into the rabbit hole, while also experimenting with more theatrical conventions. The show's director, Zoe Seaton, who also directed The Tempest, describes the evolution between the two shows:

> *'We've probably refined it in Alice, we've been clearer about, having done a few Zoom shows, about what we care about and when we feel it comes alive and, for me, there's so much storytelling we can do and anything can happen in this space and let's tell a story and let's use film as foley and let's use puppets and let's use shadows and let's rig up a snow machine and let's make this space extraordinary.'*

Backgrounds:
Chroma key was used in The Tempest to produce the digital backgrounds for the majority of the performers who had been able to rig up green screens in their home studios and had access to hardware that matched Zoom's specifications.[52] Digital backgrounds could be static or, hardware permitting, could include video.

52 For Zoom's specifications for static or moving virtual backgrounds, see
https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360043484511-System-requirements-for-Virtual-Background. See also footnote 18.

Caliban (Paul Taylor) in his cell, with illusion of spatial depth because of the perspective in the virtual background and distance between the performer and the green screen behind him

Ferdinand (Ryan Duncan) in the storm defending himself against flying debris achieving a filmic aesthetic

To achieve a sense of spatial depth, performers needed as large a room and green screen as possible, so as to be able to act in the space between the camera and a minimum 1 metre distance from the green screen. Maintaining that distance from the green screen was key to keeping the screen evenly lit without casting shadows over it that interfered with chroma key. Performers whose home set-ups did not allow much distance between the camera and the green screen were restricted in their ability to convey a sense of depth and were confined to head-and-shoulder shots, whereas cast members in larger rooms were able to do three-quarter and even full body shots and move more freely within the frame, stretching the videoconferencing aesthetic of the platform to a more filmic aesthetic.

Prospero (Simon Spencer-Hyde) in his control room creating a 'flat' video-conferencing aesthetic

Miranda (Annabelle May Terry) in Prospero's control room in a three-quarter shot with an open door that creates a sense of depth. The eyeline match with Prospero at his desk establishes their being in the virtual room together.

Trinculo (Rhodri Lewis) 'leaning' on the virtual bar, creating a sense of three-dimensional space (note that his screen is spotlit by the Stage Manager while Prospero is talking, overriding Zoom's automatic spotlighting of the speaker)

Al Barclay (Performer) explains the process by which he moved from a two-dimensional, 'flat' video-conferencing aesthetic, to a three-dimensional, more film-like depth of field as follows: 'I started off just using two planes, I was just going across [the screen], I hadn't thought about coming away and going towards so much.' This meant that he

'had a very restricted plane of movement and where I fitted some of the scene, and then I took a bit of time adjusting and tweaked all the lights and sorted, kind of, the background, and moved the laptop further away from the green screen. So then I could use perspective, I could make myself smaller or bigger and I could come in and out of shot a bit more.'

In order to create the illusion that actors sharing a scene were in the same space, it was not possible to use the exact same virtual backdrop for those actors. Instead, the angle of the backdrop had to be adapted along with the performer's positioning vis-à-vis the backdrop and within the frame, so that they could plausibly be imagined as being in slightly different parts of the same environment. Stage Manager Sinéad Owens recalls being 'quite precise: when two people were in the same room, you'd see them at a slightly different angle so it didn't look like they just had a picture behind them … but you could believe they were in the same room.' For Henry VIII, this included, for example, different ends of the hall in Oxford's Convocation House to be shown for two scene partners who were consequently imagined as spatially located face-to-face in the middle of that room.

The design of virtual backdrops furthermore needed to bear in mind the plausibility of dimensions in relation to the size of the actor's body, with, for instance, ceilings high enough not to visually press down on the head of a character. Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Performer) explains:

'You have to spend a lot of time making it look like you are in the space, because scale is something that you obviously can't control. Because if you're building a set, you're building it human-sized. If you're pulling a picture out and putting it on a flat surface behind an actor, it may be that the door is far too small for them to get through. So you'd have to look at either editing that photo, or you have to move the actor towards or away from the camera, but space limits that.'

Ariel (Ixtaso Moreno) conjuring up an analogue storm in a fish bowl

For The Tempest, one performer was unable to use any backgrounds but opted, guided by the show's designer, to create a physical set design in a cupboard that was repurposed as Ariel's cave. Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director and Director of The Tempest) recalls: 'we just started trying to help her to build a space in her house which felt like Ariel's cave and for me that was more beautiful than any virtual background we could have had'. Another performer did not have access to the hardware needed for chroma key and therefore used a projector to cast an image of a background onto a white wall; all scenes involving that performer were accordingly performed against projected images to maintain a sense of shared location between characters in the same scene.

Costumes and properties: Costume and prop design was limited for The Tempest, given the speed at which it was converted into a Zoom show, to items that had been used for the previous year's physical show, small items that could be shipped to performers, and items owned by the performers and adapted for the production with the guidance of the designer. For subsequent shows, Creation Theatre's designer has worked with performers to obtain their measurements and done costume fittings via videocalls. Performers report having to be very careful about the colour of their garments when using chroma key, as colours that are too close to the colour of the green screen can be absorbed by the virtual background:

'… if I got it just a little bit wrong part of me would just vanish. … I kept disappearing into [the projection behind him] because if the light was wrong, the black of my jacket, so I'd get it off as quickly as I could. Or the blue of my tie: there was no point wearing a tie at all, really, it kept being eaten up. So until I had a proper green screen that was… a lot of it had to do with "how do I light myself"' **- Al Barclay, Performer**

Al Barclay's jacket being absorbed by chroma key

Performers report that working with what was at hand 'limits the creativity of the design and places more emphasis on the creativity of the use' (Giles Stoakley, Production Manager and Performer). Properties and their imaginative use in The Tempest were a key way of maintaining the theatricality of the production in a screen setting. Examples include a simple board repurposed as a trap door entrance into Prospero's control room; a combination of computer wires, headphones and a live snake that allowed King Alonso to rig up an impromptu communication device through which he could interact directly with the audience and ask them to show him the pets and cuddly toys that helped them through their respective solitudes; and a hole in a 'tree trunk' (a flat panel with a tree trunk print on it) enabling Miranda and Ferdinand to communicate in a manner that worked as an intertheatrical citation of Pyramus and Thisbe's wall in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Performers also report that having to rely on them to provide elements of props and costume design made them feel somewhat under pressure. As The Tempest's director Zoe Seaton also explains, the reliance on home-sourced props and costumes, while 'brilliant' in that 'actors [are] more involved in the process of home made props/effects, … also needs a designer to pull the aesthetic elements together.'
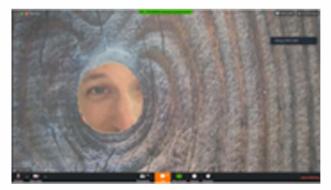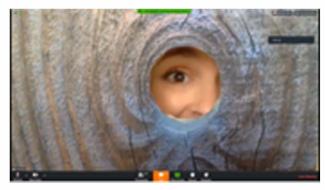
Caliban (Paul Taylor) in Prospero's control room with a 'trap door'; note the bottom-up angle of the virtual backdrop for the control room that matches the position of the camera

King Alonso (Al Barclay) with snake and home-made communication device

Ferdinand (Ryan Duncan) and Miranda (Annabelle May Terry) communicating through the hole in the 'tree trunk'

Lighting:

Lighting design for Zoom is more akin to lighting for television than it is to lighting for a theatrical set. The basic principle of Zoom lighting to enable a smooth functioning of chroma key is that the green screen behind the performer needs to be lit clearly and evenly, without shadows cast onto it by the performer or props, and that the performer needs additional lighting on their face and body.

Production Manager Giles Stoakley explains the ideal lighting set-up for the use of chroma key on Zoom: 'in a world of dreams you'd be in a studio and the actor would have lighting on them from the two diagonals in front them, the key light behind them, and then your green screen would be separately lit. And then, in a world of dreams, you'd never be closer to your green screen than a metre… so that you're not casting shadows on the green screen.' He concludes: 'We can't do that in bedrooms. So it's just about trying, and it's a really difficult battle.'

Lighting design for The Tempest was the responsibility of the Production Manager and the Stage Manager, who guided performers to repurpose whatever lights they had in the house and to position the additional soft box lights several performers purchased with the bonus payment they referred to as their 'tech budget' so as to achieve the dual goal of lighting both the green screen and the performer. Lighting also turned out to be a factor in creating the perception of depth in the relation of an actor vis-à-vis their virtual backdrop. Performers working in rooms with a lot of natural light additionally had to find ways of blocking out that light if it interfered with their studio lights, as natural and artificial light are not on the same spectrum.

Sound:

Like lighting, sound design is challenging on the Zoom platform, mainly because it is a platform designed for videoconferencing rather than performance and is therefore set up to privilege and respond to the human voice, which can trigger the automatic spotlighting of an unmuted participant's screen. If performers are using webcams or laptops with integrated microphones, furthermore, those, too, are designed for videoconferencing rather than performance and are therefore predominantly directional, with good audio for speech addressed to the camera but less good audio capture for sounds produced from the side or to the side or towards the rear of the home studio. Some performers therefore used additional podcast microphones that could capture their voices from other parts of their home studios than their laptop's or webcam's built-in microphone.

> 'Sound quality can be improved by separating microphone from speaker, i.e. using a separate speaker that is far away from the inbuilt microphone in your laptop.' – Ryan Duncan, Performer

Performers also found it challenging to know how loud they should be in their vocal delivery and reported that it was 'hard to […] self-monitor as you are only at the production end of sound for yourself' (Al Barclay, Performer). The problem is compounded by the fact that the sound levels that the Stage Manager hears when feeding a sound effect or an underscore into the performance using QLab (see Part 3: Shifts in Responsibilities: Stage Manager) is at a different level from that heard by participants in the show. Stage Manager Sinéad Owens stresses that 'If you want an underscore, it has to be really quiet or else it will become the dominant sound'. Production Manager Giles Stoakley adds that 'the limitations of Zoom mean that
[sound] design is necessarily compromised by the importance of hearing the actor clearly.'

For The Tempest, the production team also ran up against problems with permissions. They were unable to use some of the music that had been part of the 2019 physical production and for which they had obtained PRS permissions when they moved online, mainly because staff at PRS had been furloughed and the company was asked to secure permissions directly with the rights holders.

As this process was too slow for the timeline of the production, the team had to resort to using music that had no copyright restrictions and to changing the sound design for the production accordingly.

Directing for Zoom: Zoom affordances and dramaturgy
Zoom affordances: a new performance medium

> *'The Tempest, you know, it was a new form in a way for all of us'* – Al Barclay, Performer

Members of the production team for The Tempest expressed their awareness that while what they were creating involved borrowing from the conventions of theatre, film, television and even radio, they were essentially experimenting with a new, hybrid, performance medium that has unique affordances. Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Performer) is clear that 'Zoom theatre is not a piece of film and the live element of the form means that striving for perfection is actually obstructive to the story telling'. Zoom theatre, thanks to the use of virtual backgrounds, allows for swift and creative changes in location and scene: 'Change your background in the blink of an eye! Disappear and reappear! Basically lots of special effects' (Annabelle May Terry, Performer). As that comment shows, a key element for members of the Tempest team was the playfulness that was possible in the medium: when they realised that performer Rhodri Lewis' green screen was prone to 'swallowing up' the bottle he was holding as Trinculo, they worked the magical disappearance of the bottle into an alcohol-fuelled set piece.

Trinculo (Rhodri Lewis) and the disappearing bottle

That playfulness, in turn, was understood as a signifier of both the liveness and theatricality of the medium:

> *'There's a joy in the playfulness. Live theatre is about the playfulness. So when an audience goes and watches a live show, everybody knows that an actor can forget their lines, … and everybody sometimes watches the prop that doesn't do what it's supposed to do or is not there, and everybody watches a live solution, and then afterwards they go: "I couldn't tell whether that was supposed to happen or not" and that [is the] joy of the knife edge, of the possibility of total collapse – and the fact that it doesn't happen.'*
> – Al Barclay, Performer

It is this playfulness, too, that turned potential disasters into serendipitous gains, as happened in a performance in which Paul Taylor, playing Caliban, had issues with his internet connection and Zoom issued the warning, visible on audiences' screens, that 'Caliban's network bandwidth is low', which was promptly interpreted by audiences as the software's validation of the character's lack of intelligence.

While videoconferencing cannot replicate entirely the experience of co-presence in a single time and place, and performers reported missing the ability to physically interact with the audience through touch and share sensory experiences such as smell with them, some performers actually reported an increase in the quality of interaction with the audience on Zoom. For performer Annabelle May Terry, the ability to 'see the audience and how they are reacting' was in some ways superior to what is 'possible in traditional theatre space' when the house lights are down. Ryan Duncan (Performer) concurs: while Zoom doesn't allow performers to 'touch audience members, lead them somewhere, share a prop with them … now you have the opportunity of someone in their living room not feeling everybody's eyes on them, feeling safe, so people do really silly things.' Other performers commented on the intimacy possible between the performer speaking to the camera as if directly to an individual audience member, likening the experience to radio technique, which also involves treating the microphone as a single conversation partner. Al Barclay (Performer), too, took a positive view of the forms of togetherness facilitated by the videoconferencing platform: 'You know, we enjoyed the fun of the backgrounds, we know the people aren't in the room together and that's sort of making an advantage of a disadvantage, which is what Creation and Big Telly sort of taught us could be so fun and fulfilling in a way because when we can't be in a room with each other we kind of more and more we want to feel that, and feel like we're connected to each other.'

Dramaturgy for Zoom:

Running time and script editing:
Members of the creative team agree that 'Zoom fatigue' is real and affects not only performers, but also viewers. Zoom shows therefore have to be limited in duration, with 60-75 minutes cited as the ideal to maximum lengths of a performance. This has a significant impact on dramaturgy and textual editing, with what can in the theatre be a three-hour running time for The Tempest reduced, for the 2020 digital production, to just over one hour.

Audience participation:
> 'I don't think that Zoom theatre is worth doing unless the audience are aware that we are aware of the audience. So you have to show audience members in a Zoom show otherwise it's simply not worth doing.'
> – Giles Stoakley, Production Manager and Performer

Members of the team agreed that for The Tempest, involving the audience in the show was crucial 'in order that the production feels live so there has to be an insertion of some kind of interaction' (Giles Stoakley, Production Manager and Performer). Audience interaction could take a variety of forms: it could consist of audience members volunteering to ask a question at a 'press conference' at the start of the show, contributing to the creation of a soundscape for the tempest or various island animals, which was possible with cameras muted but sound unmuted, or being spotlit while creating a sound, performing as a predatory island bird or dog, or while tantalisingly waving food at the hungry shipwrecked courtiers (waving a coveted packet of rice at a time when rice was unobtainable in supermarkets became a shared joke in the early weeks of lockdown). As Simon Spencer-Hyde (Performer) reported, the show's 'specifically interactive content so the audience could be involved […] worked very well indeed.'

Audience participation in the wedding celebrations

Production Manager Giles Stoakley sees being able to 'involve the audience without them feeling singled out or uncomfortable' as a valuable affordance of the Zoom medium. For The Tempest, the Stage Manager was careful only to spotlight members of the audience who were visibly having fun:

'Sinead's job would be to see how playful people wanted to be and then chose them on that basis so nobody ever, I hope, got spotlit who didn't want to. We're trying to read them and we're trying to genuinely be in that kind of dialogue with them. I think that's really important to me, I feel really sad about the things I've seen that I think have exploited the audience rather than offered them the chance to play' **- Zoe Seaton, Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest.**

'I just looked for people who were taking part, and because the editing is so quick, so if the same person came up twice, I probably didn't notice that I was spotlighting them twice. … I'm just putting people up that are the most craic, so if you're not good craic, you're not getting up on screen' **- Sinéad Owens, Stage Manager.**

While for Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest) 'it was never an option to make something without the audience,' that does not mean that she thinks that audience participation should always be a feature of productions using the Zoom platform. She says:

'I suppose I'm kind of cautious around saying that is what you have to do – that is right for the kind of work we want to make but I also have been to some dreadful Zoom things where it's been really clunky and I would prefer there to be no audience participation than it not be gently handled because I think it is really important that the audience feel that there is a spectrum of playfulness and they can play on whatever level they want and they are just as loved in this room if they choose not to play or if they want to play.'

Seaton's insight is borne out by Creation Theatre's rehearsed reading of Henry VIII, which involved no audience participation within the show. Audiences engaged independently by taking to Twitter to tweet their responses and also participated in the performance's virtual curtain call, when viewers were able to switch from 'Speaker View' to 'Gallery View' to see other members of the audience and, with audio unmuted, applaud the performers. Rhodri Lewis, who played Trinculo in The Tempest and King Henry VIII in Henry VIII, reflects:

'I think sometimes you do things and there's a risk of doing something just because, or you have to get them involved somehow and sometimes it breaks up the flow of something that you are doing or it can be a bit panto when you don't want it to be. I just think, it's something you should have in your tool bag or your tool box but it's not necessarily something that you have to use every time.'

Pre-recorded video content:

The medium also makes it possible to use pre-recorded video content, which can be either streamed through the software or played on a separate device whose screen is recorded on a camera that is part of the Zoom call and that can be spotlit by the Stage Manager.

For The Tempest, three segments of pre-recorded material were included in the production: a shot of Miranda venturing out into her garden to look for Ferdinand, which could not be played live because the performer's WiFi connection was not equally strong in the parts of the house she needed to walk through to reach her garden; a sequence in which Miranda and Ferdinand were in adjacent screens separated by an imaginary wall through which Miranda managed to break with her hand, which exited her screen and seemingly entered his screen to receive an engagement ring; and a scene in which 'Prospero's magic' allowed the two lovers to share a screen filled with flowers.

Ferdinand (Ryan Duncan) and Miranda (Annabelle May Terry) united (pre-recorded)

The Tempest's director Zoe Seaton, however, warns against using too much film in a live production:

'I want it to feel like a live thing for me, not a dead thing and when we started doing the Tempest originally I was going to be using lots of film but I just felt that it all died. […] So the storm was going to be recorded, and then Sinead played a beautiful film of a storm and I was like, no, it's died, the whole thing has died, it's gone. […] So I'm not interested in a dead piece of tied-in finished film I don't think. But I'm interested in foley, I'm interested in using film as a live thing and I'm interested in visual mixing, I'm interested in anything that makes the live feel like it's full of surprise and potential.'

While pre-recorded material, used as 'elastic content' that can be dropped into the performance in case of a loss of connectivity, can serve as an important safety-net in Zoom performance, therefore, for Seaton it is most valuable when it is not functioning in the slick manner of television or film. For the Zoom performance to maintain its live theatricality, Seaton uses pre-recorded content as a form of 'visual foley':

'I love the combination of different ways of playing "let's pretend." So for me, when I started making Zoom theatre it felt a bit like visual foley, it felt a bit like taking images and using them in the same way that you would use sound foley and I wanted to use film in the same way that foley uses sound as a component, I wanted to use film as an element rather than the end game.'

Her key advice for Zoom theatre makers is: *'don't try to make a film.'*

Storytelling:
Given her experience in site-responsive theatre, game theatre and in curating immersive experiences for Big Telly, Zoe Seaton's approach to re-imagining that production for Zoom was concerned with 'crafting an experience for the people who go through the story' (Al Barclay, Performer). Stage Manager Sinéad Owens stresses how easy it has become, on Zoom, to ensure that audiences spot the telling detail needed to progress with the story:

'on Zoom, because there's a camera, you can draw the audience's attention exactly where you want them to. … it's a bit like film in that sense that we show the audience what we want them to see. They will have picked up on other things as well, but they will have seen the things we want them to see that maybe on stage they might have missed maybe if they had watched somebody else.'

Seaton finds directing for Zoom gives her 'more potential to tell a story using different techniques' and gives her access to 'more visual options'.

Virtual backgrounds are one of those options, but they come with the risk of 'flatness' and 'dullness', which Seaton seeks to combat: 'I like it when it's a virtual screen and then you lift something from it so you go oh I didn't know that was a virtual screen so you play with that illusion I think.' In The Tempest, making Paul Taylor, playing Caliban, step between two green screens, for example, made his legs disappear into the virtual dinosaur that was swallowing him alive, with only his upper body emerging from the dinosaur's mouth, giving the virtual background a disconcertingly three-dimensional feel.

This creative approach to storytelling and Seaton's insistence on not attempting to produce a film meant that the production was able to accommodate a range of stylistic choices that included an Ariel who was resolutely analogue in her magic. In striking contrast to the 2016 RSC production which, in partnership with Intel and motion capture studio Imaginarium, imagined Ariel as a technological spirit whose avatar took on a range of digital shapes, Ixtaso Moreno's Ariel in the 2020 Creation Theatre and Big Telly co-production, performing from her cupboard repurposed as the spirit's cave, 'gave us the key to that playful theatricality of how she was making a storm in a bowl in her room'. For Seaton, that 'was much more interesting than if she had been able to use video and was magicking up a piece of tech so it felt like that was a real portal into the world of "we're all going to make a storm by clapping our hands"'. Within a digital environment, Ariel's analogue magic was a prime example of how it would be able to create an imaginary world in which there was a space for 'physical things rather than virtual things.'

Liveness:

> 'if you took away the interactive elements, you'd still be watching a live piece of theatre, but all that that is … is a not quite as good a version as if you got to see it live in the theatre. Or you're competing with the National Theatre that has all this equipment and cameras and you're doing it over Zoom in your living room: you can't compete with that. So how do you use this, the fact that you can see the audience and they can see you and you can interact with them, how do you make something that is different' – Ryan Duncan, Performer

For many members of the creative team, liveness is a key affordance of the Zoom platform which distinguishes it fundamentally from the archival recordings of past productions by organisations such as NT Live, RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon, Globe on Screen and the many archival recordings made available during the Covid pandemic by European theatre companies and the Stratford Festival Theatre in Ontario. Whereas Al Barclay (Performer) describes such archival recordings as 'not theatre. It's just a memory'; he sees The Tempest as 'a live response, where other people who were isolated as well were able to tune in and share the connection with the actors in this […] space which is about trickery, it is about this insubstantial pageant and yet, for that moment until it faded we had it, and we remember the connection we felt.'

Simon Spence-Hyde (Prospero) during the curtain call while removing his green screen

It is this sense of connection that is particularly obvious in the virtual curtain calls Creation Theatre shows include, which involve chroma key backgrounds disappearing to reveal the actors in their homes standing before their green screens which, in The Tempest's curtain call, they began to take down, leaving 'not a rack behind'. Audiences in their individual homes were able to unmute their audio and give the cast a collective round of applause.

Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Performer) recalls: 'One of the things that we found in our shows is that [the applause] is a really important part of people feeling like they're in a communal space again….to hear yourself and other people reacting to something that you have shared despite not having shared it.' Especially in lockdown, this live experience of being part of a community, as the audience research in Part 6 of this report confirms, was an important factor in the warmth with which the production was received. Stoakley comments: 'I think that people are desperate, I think that's what they've really missed about theatre, it's as much about enjoying the performance, but actually a communal sense of having shared an emotion or an emotional journey, which applause is an expression of.'

Challenges and limitations of the Zoom platform for theatrical performance

Zoom is a videoconferencing platform which is not designed for performance and which is dependent on high internet speeds to produce optimum sound and picture quality. Tiny lags between participating devices are inevitable, and while these are negligible for videoconferencing purposes, they make synchronous communal singing and/or dancing, or for that matter any action that depends on exact synchronicity between devices in different locations impracticable even if all participants have excellent bandwidth. It is therefore currently impossible to perform musicals, operas, concerts and ballets live on Zoom, with all successful Zoom performances in these genres to date relying on pre-recorded material being edited together to eliminate lags. For The Tempest, tellingly, the lag was used for comic effect in an audience participation sequence when audiences were asked to sing the courtiers to sleep with a rendition of 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' that was catastrophically out of synch and tune.

> 'you are relying heavily on the internet being on your side. Basically the main challenge is the risk that a performer/audience member has poor bandwith.' – **Crissy O'Donovan, Producer**

> 'You are always on the screen and the audience see everything. Unless you physically exit the screen, you have to remain in character and not look bewildered if something technically is going awry.' – **Annabelle May Terry, Performer**

For maximum functionality, the software is furthermore dependent on the hardware on which it is used matching its specifications, and the software reacts differently to different operating systems (Windows vs. Apple). The platform's design also necessitates the use of additional software, such as ManyCam and QLab, to make it possible to spotlight more than one screen at a time or play underscoring sound. It is automatically set up so as to respond to human voices that trigger spotlighting of the speaker's screen and does not, without additional software, enable the simultaneous spotlighting of more than one screen in a spatial arrangement of the Stage Manager's choice. Whereas up to May 2020, it was possible for the Stage Manager to mute and unmute the audience, a Zoom 'host' is now no longer able to unmute participants, who have to perform this action themselves.

Dealing with connectivity problems: The main challenge of working on Zoom, all participants agree, has to do with internet connectivity and the danger of disconnecting from a call or struggling on with low bandwidth. Participants with fibre-optic cable connections fared better in terms of reliability than those relying on WiFi connections, and some members of the team had to rely on additional smartphone data to re-route their connection via the mobile phone network in the event of their bandwidth being low. As Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer) remarks, however, for companies like Creation Theatre and Big Telly that have a lot of experience working outdoors and in found locations, the disruption to a performance caused by a poor connection does not pose an entirely novel challenge, as 'bandwith interference is a part of [live digital theatre] in the same way rain or a flock of ducks would disrupt open air theatre.'

'The internet here isn't very good. So permanently I have my phone ready on 4G so I can tether my connection on that the minute my connection drops out. But you have to keep an eye on the bar levels because by the time you've got the message "your internet connection is unstable" that's too late, you're gone. So the minute that happened, I've had to switch over to tethering to my phone, then switch back when the 4G dropped out so I had to go onto WiFi again. … Then we had a WhatsApp emergency group on the phone if while we were there one of the actors was booted out we got an emergency message saying "So-and-so has been booted out, can you do the next scene up to this bit? Get ready to jump in at that point."' – Paul Taylor, Performer

'Regarding the internet, there is only so much you can control. We improved actors' tech and upgraded/supplied back up data if necessary. We also had people in every show who could jump in and read or who could provide some filmed content as a place holder while the actor returned to the call. It's all about having procedures in place really. But the reality is that we're still very much at the mercy of the internet.' – Crissy O'Donovan, Producer

Creation Theatre and Big Telly use a range of safety nets and strategies to deal with internet disruptions. While Crissy O'Donovan, Creation Theatre's Producer, describes their approach to connectivity for The Tempest as 'so naïve', as they relied entirely on actors' improvisation skills and the goodwill of audiences, since that first Zoom show, a hierarchy of backups has been set in place.

Throughout each performance, a WhatsApp group call connects all performers and members of the creative team, including the Producer, Stage Manager, and the Chief Executive and Creative Producer, who are all at hand to jump in if necessary. In the event of an internet failure, in the first instance, the company attempt to replace live with live, with performers improvising to cover up the fact that another performer has dropped out of the Zoom call. If that is not possible, there are two options: either a member of the creative team will jump in to read the performer's part until the connection has been re-established, or a piece of pre-recorded video will be played that functions as 'elastic content', i.e. content that is not specific to a particular scene but that can plausibly be slotted into any place in the production and played until the performance can resume. Crissy O'Donovan (Producer, Creation Theatre) muses:

'Is the best thing to put the elastic content in and then allow the actor the time to return to the call and pick it up, or disrupt the creative flow by having someone read in who's not the actor? And I think in that context, elastic content … is actually the best option. … My gut instinct, creatively, is to prefer elastic content so that the audience doesn't realise that there's a delay or that there's something wrong, to keep them within that world.'

It is only if all those measures fail that there will be a 'show stop' – a situation that has not arisen to date.

Further Opportunities arising from using the Zoom platform for theatrical performance

Performing on Zoom brings with it a range of benefits beyond those discussed above. This mode of working radically reduces overheads, as it requires no venue or rehearsal room hire or set construction. Audiences can be instantly transported to new locations, while neither audiences nor members of the creative team have to travel to a venue. Performers and audiences alike are able to participate from the comfort of their own homes, which involves a significantly smaller investment of time and a greater sense of safety, as performers are able to 'talk to people who are in their own homes, relaxed and feeling safe', making it easier to 'Get them to be silly with us' (Al Barclay, Performer)

'I quite like the fact that someone could just be doing the dishes and then five minutes before the show starts dry their hands and go and watch a show you know?'' – Rhodri Lewis, performer

Zoom performance also brings with it environmental gains. Unlike physical theatre, whose carbon footprint is relatively large because of the need of audiences and performers to travel to the venue; sets to be built, struck and disposed of at the end of the run; and the need for lights and sound systems, Zoom theatre has a comparatively smaller carbon footprint. Lights are still used in the individual homes of performers, who are also using energy through their connection to the internet. However, the majority of the creative team report very significant reductions in their work-related travel (which, for the Northern Irish members of the team, often involved flights from Belfast to England) and the waste they generated as a result of eating out (see Part 4: 'Behavioural Change: Environmental Impact'). As Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer, Creation Theatre) remarks: 'our summer show this year was meant to be a completely carbon neutral sustainable version of Wind in the Willows, and accidentally, we've ended up making work that's so much more environmental than anything we've ever done … and I hope we'll really hold on to questioning the previous wastage … of the whole endeavour [that was] so wasteful.'

Digital Theatre Transformation, Part 4: Understanding the impact of shift to online working for creative staff

Rehearsal

> *'Before the Covid-19 outbreak, we would all be in the same room together; collaborating, creating and devising within the rehearsal room. Now, this is all done from a distance and through a screen.'* – Annabelle May Terry, Performer

> *'I think it's important to be available and to be aware that you are missing all of those chats when you get your coat on or go to the pub or you get a cup of tea – you are missing those opportunities to read how people are … you're missing that moment to just look into someone's eyes and go 'are you alright' or 'do you want a chat'.'* – Zoe Seaton, Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest

The company's digital transformation, for its performers and creative team, involved a radical shift from a physical rehearsal space and face-to-face interactions during structured rehearsals as well as informal contact during breaks and at the start and the end of the day, to online-only interactions. These virtual rehearsals mostly took place on the Zoom platform, with the director occasionally reaching out to individual members of the team over the telephone outside official rehearsal times. The shift to online rehearsals presented a number of challenges, including managing screen fatigue, dealing with the lack of physical co-presence and social interaction, and working around the lack of physical cues.

Focus and screen fatigue:
Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest) was keen for the cast to focus on the rehearsal without communicating via other channels at the same time: she saw actors using Zoom's chat function during rehearsals as being as unacceptable as passing a note would be in a physical rehearsal. As a result, rehearsals were periods of intense concentration by all those involved, with an implicit expectation that even members of the cast not directly involved in a scene would focus on their screens. Unlike a physical rehearsal room, a Zoom space makes it possible for participants in a rehearsal to listen in with their own cameras switched off without looking at the screen while doing something else connected to the production, such as working on a property or a scene. This is an affordance of Zoom that was often used by Lucy Askew (Creation Theatre's Chief Executive and Creative Producer), Sinéad Owens (Stage Manager) and Giles Stoakeey (Production Manager and Performer), who were able to dip into rehearsals without disrupting them while being able to offer support when needed. This affordance, Rhodri Lewis (Performer), suggests, might also be of benefit to members of the cast not directly involved in a scene that is being rehearsed, who could be part of the virtual rehearsal without necessarily focusing on the screen, using the time when they are not explicitly needed to 'rest your eyes a bit or to think about the next scene'. For them, it would be helpful to have 'an open conversation at the start of rehearsal to say, is it ok if I get up and go and walk around and sit over there, I'm still listening.'

Several other performers similarly drew attention to the need not to ask actors to sit in front of a screen all day, referring to the tactile and highly mobile nature of their training and normal ways of working to explain why they needed to be able to move around and not be entirely focused on the screen.

For The Tempest, rehearsals were spread out over a period of two weeks, rather than the single week that would have been required for face-to-face rehearsals of a show the performers had worked on previously, with four hours of rehearsals scheduled per day in total. To accommodate 'Zoom fatigue' and difficulties concentrating, virtual rehearsals were more limited in duration than their physical counterparts (two-and-a-half hours at a stretch was mentioned as the maximum duration any single member of the cast could manage) and were often confined to just the performers needed for a scene. As Stage Manager Sinéad Owens remembers, the team found it 'beneficial to rehearse two people for an hour, and then the next two people for an hour.' Generally, she finds that 'shorter rehearsals with small groups of people are definitely more beneficial as energy levels can dip much quicker when working online and in large groups it's hard to get focus.' All the actors who commented on the duration of rehearsals agreed that shorter rehearsals were more productive.

Company cohesion and social interaction:
Actors also had informal Zoom rehearsals with their scene partner or alone while the director was busy with another group of performers. As Madeleine McMahon (Performer) reported, 'time between rehearsals was as important [as the rehearsal itself], we would try and come up with ideas or solutions to our scenes without the director.' At times, there was a formal framework for such separate rehearsal between scene partners within the Zoom platform. She explains:

> 'we'd be in a big rehearsal Zoom meeting and they'd say ok you two go off and play with that scene for 15 minutes and so me and Giles [Stoakley, her scene partner] would go into a breakout room to do that, which is good because then I got to know him a bit better'.

This mode of working almost exclusively with her scene partner made her feel 'responsible for our short section, but very removed from everyone else.' In fact, the director's attempts to limit the performers' screen time and conserve their energy had the unintended side-effect of making company members feel distanced from each other, with McMahon reporting that she and her scene partner 'didn't feel part of a whole production until quite late on.'

> 'There is little opportunity to bond outside rehearsals – it's not the same over zoom! We had the benefit of already knowing each other, but building a good working relationship and being able to debrief in a casual environment after rehearsals and shows is harder.' – Ryan Duncan, Performer

Other performers also reported feeling more 'distanced' from the rest of the cast, with the newcomer to the company, Rhodri Lewis, especially sensitive to the way in which working on Zoom made it more difficult than usual to bond with the rest of the cast, who knew each other well from working on the show together the previous year. He reflects that working in theatre is 'a very social business' and that working on Zoom made him realise the importance of social interaction between performers. That feeling was shared: Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Performer) also found that it was 'very odd to perform with someone you have not physically met' but noted that 'Creation often use actors who have been in their shows before which helps the process.'

Other performers mentioned 'no hugging and winding down' after rehearsals as one of the noticeable changes brought about by digital work (Al Barclay, Performer), with Annabelle May Terry (Performer) commenting:

'I think we are tactile people and when we train we are all shoved in a room together and we all bond and […] a lot of us are very affectionate […] I miss being able to roll round on the floor and express myself and stage combat and all that kind of stuff.'

Physical distance, then, was a challenge in social terms, to enable performers literally to connect with other members of the cast and use their physical senses to relate to one another.

Since rehearsing The Tempest, its director Zoe Seaton has directed several shows for Zoom and evolved a way of working that is more rigorously structured to include softer transitions into and out of the Zoom call. Reflecting on the experience of working with a cast who 'hadn't seen each other for ages', she now thinks that she 'probably should have allowed and structured a catch-up time' at the beginning of the rehearsal period. At the start of a day of rehearsals, there is now a period of social interaction between performers in breakout rooms before everyone gathers on a single screen for the rehearsal proper. This mode of working corresponds more closely to performer Madeleine McMahon's desire for rehearsals to start with 'a bit of structure' that involves the director checking in with the cast and explaining the plan for the day's rehearsals, including sending off scene partners to work on their scene independently and report back at a specified time. Seaton now also builds in some time at the end of a rehearsal, when she and the Stage Manager remain on the Zoom call in order to allow actors who want to have a more informal chat with them to have that conversation.

'I think it's important to release people but to say to people they can stay if they want. … it's just ok to say, look the session is over now but I'll be here for another ten minutes if you've any questions …. What Sinéad and I would always do on shows is that we would open up the room much earlier than we needed to and say the show is at 3 but the room will be open from 2 if you want to call in. Sometimes people did want to be there and that's when you'd find stuff out so I think it's about making that slightly abrupt Zoom context a bit softer on both ends. – **Zoe Seaton, Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest**

Creating virtual spaces for social interaction, most performers agree, is also vitally important once the show is up and running: almost all performers discussed the need to wind down together after a performance and the impact the abruptness of disconnection at the end of a Zoom call had on their sense of wellbeing and community. While for some performers, the ability to leave the call and return immediately to their home setting had important benefits in terms of being able to spend more time with their family (discussed below), many reported a strong desire for some communal time to chat about what went right or wrong with the night's performance and replicate, albeit in a virtual environment, the time traditionally spent in the pub or over a drink after a physical performance. Performers who were also in the cast of Creation Theatre's next show, Time Machine, enjoyed the fact that the format of the show involved performers being put into a 'breakout room' on Zoom at the end of the show. Rhodri Lewis (Performer) welcomed having 'a warm down, not necessarily drinks but some sort of social thing afterwards … for the cast and the crew and everybody just to unwind and talk'.

Lack of physical cues:

The absence of physical co-presence meant that the performers could no longer rely on their scene partners' physical cues. Zoom, for the most part, limits the visibility of the body to head and shoulders, so that physical actors habituated to using their whole bodies to communicate have to adapt their approach to communicating not just with their audience, but also with their fellow-actors. Annabelle May Terry (Performer) describes the limitations of the medium as not including 'that element of being tactile with someone, … there is a barrier there which you do have to overcome by watching them intently and picking up on any slight – it's mostly in the face and arms, most of the time it's not about your legs or your full body.' Rehearsing in an environment in which everyone is 'acting from the waist up' (Al Barclay, Performer), therefore, involves 'picking up on as much upper body language as you can, looking them in the eye' and paying particular attention to vocal rather than physical cues (Annabelle May Terry, Performer).

Stage Manager Sinéad Owens observed that rehearsing on Zoom is 'a very different style of working that doesn't suit everyone'. It also involves gradually switching from paying attention to the actions of fellow-actors visible on Zoom's 'Gallery View' setting, in which performers are able to see not just themselves but also their fellow performers and respond to their facial expressions and gestures, to no longer being able to see them once the Stage Manager got involved and started to spotlight specific members of the cast in 'Speaker View'. When performing, actors were therefore often only able to see themselves and not their scene partners or members of the audience.

Looking for a physical cue given by a scene partner on-screen was problematic even when they were visible because, as Ryan Duncan (Performer) explains, Zoom introduces tiny lags that make spontaneous interaction difficult. In addition, he points out, 'during a performance you have to really focus on the camera, because any change in your eyeline as you're trying to see the other performers somewhere on the screen will be seen by the audience', just as actors reading their lines can be seen to focus their eyes on their screen rather than the camera. Therefore, 'rehearsal had an element of technical rehearsing which did slow things down', with time spent on agreeing eye-lines, checking positioning within the frame and lighting, and working on exchanges of objects. Rehearsals therefore could end up being 'much more about getting it to 'work', than about character' (Madeleine McMahon, Performer), with performers additionally spending time on their own to rehearse how to discreetly operate Zoom commands during a scene.

Performing on Zoom

Getting into character:

Whereas some performers thought that there was not much difference between the process of getting into character on Zoom and in a face-to-face setting, others found that Zoom posed new challenges. Ryan Duncan (Performer) suggests that it was easier to be 'a little lazy with [getting into character] as you don't have that switch into work mode that you get when entering rehearsal rooms,' and Madeleine McMahon (Performer) found that working from home 'affects focus […] I like working away, as it makes me focus on my work.' Annabelle May Terry (Performer) concurs: transitioning into the right frame of mind for a performance could be tricky, as working on a laptop was associated 'with the monotony of sending emails, completing tax returns, writing invoices etc.' and being at home would make it 'easy to just lay about'.

To combat the 'lull in motivation' felt at the start of the day, she resorted to deliberately structuring her working day in order to be ready 'to actually plug in and be present and coherent' in rehearsals and performance. Al Barclay (Performer), too, found that he needed to resort to additional physical triggers to be able to get into character: 'I found personal items that helped trigger me into the king, even if they were only visible for seconds […] Things I'd never have taken out of the house to the theatre.'

Staying in character was also a challenge for several performers, who report that the technical demands of performance on Zoom, which involves performers taking responsibility for their individual studio sets, their lighting, and the operation of Zoom commands to change their backgrounds, camera and to mute/unmute their audio and video, could interfere with their performance. Being in character was 'no longer [a performer's] main concern' when working in the digital medium, Madeleine McMahon (Performer) found. Paul Taylor (Performer) agrees: while usually, he relies on instinct during a performance, having additional technical operations to carry out while performing a role – especially whenever something went wrong – could be quite demanding. He explains: 'The camera's there on you. You can't show that frustration and you're also manically trying to change things without [it showing].' For him as for others, having to 'break out to do something [technical] when you're enjoying that immersion in that scene' can be 'annoying.' At the same time, he admits that this 'can be a help at other points […] It stops you getting too serious about what you're doing.'

> 'Because I'm running my own tech, which I wouldn't normally do as an actor, it has meant adapting how I get into character because there is less time to indulge in that during the performance itself. … You are always on the screen and the audience see everything. Unless you physically exit the screen, you have to remain in character and not look bewildered if something technically is going awry.' – **Annabelle May Terry, Performer**

> Multi-tasking during a performance is 'like playing tennis but you've got a dog with you on a lead, and you can do it, you can play tennis, it's fine, the dog can run around and move with you as you are playing tennis but you've got a dog with you, you know? Every so often the dog tugs you away or maybe you trip over the dog sometimes, but it's possible to play tennis with a dog on a lead but it's not ideal. It's a thing that's always there, you're holding the lead and you know it's there but you go along with it and you get used to it but yeah…that's the only way I can describe it really.' – **Rhodri Lewis, Performer**

Another aspect of characterisation that was clearly affected by the digital medium was the volume of a performance, which is linked to its theatricality and interactivity. Madeleine McMahon (Performer) explains:

> 'So as actors, especially the company for this who were quite experienced theatre performers, a couple of us have done bits of TV or short film, but it's a very different volume, if you like, it's a bit like the difference between being a sprint runner and a long distance runner, it's the same set of skills but you are using them in very different ways. So telling a story on this level a performance can quite quickly look quite large and over the top, but if you were to do it this size in the middle of the Olivier theatre, it would seem a very small character. So you're paring down the way that you perform the character while at the same time being aware that the interactive nature that the director wanted was for a theatre crowd.'

Rhodri Lewis (Performer) gives a similar sentiment a different spin when he describes the importance of direct address in Zoom performance. For him, having the time to rehearse with a camera, as the company did for The Tempest, allowed him to get used to the medium and play around with switching between talking to other characters in a fictional space and breaking through the imaginary fourth wall to address the audience directly. He says:
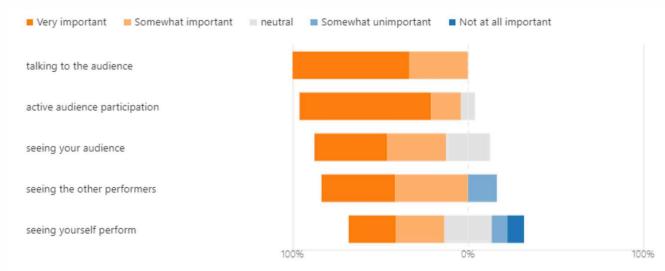
'suddenly if you're in a scene or you're doing something, especially if you're doing Shakespeare then you're have an aside and suddenly the aside is right there in the screen, it [...] really changes it [...] more so than on stage I think, because it's so immediate and because you're breaking that fourth wall and it's right there, as you can see the TV is close up, you can kind of see the thought processes a bit more [...] It's more intimate perhaps than I've experienced on stage [...] I think there's an intimacy there perhaps, that when you are directing it into the camera you can bring it right down.'

Several performers therefore identify Zoom as a hybrid medium which required of them skills associated with acting for theatre and for television.

Interaction with the audience:

Bearing in mind the needs of the Zoom audience and approaching the performance as a hybrid of theatrical and film modes of acting put pressure on actors' approach to character. Sinéad Owens (Stage Manager) was well aware of how acting for a virtual rather than a physical show could be challenging because the actors are 'just performing to a laptop in their living rooms or their bedrooms, so I think it was a completely different experience to act on Zoom', especially during performances, when actors working with only one monitor could only see themselves to the exclusion of the rest of the cast or any audience members whenever they were spotlit. Performers report having difficulty gauging the audience's reactions as a result. Increasingly, some performers are using a second monitor that is set to 'Gallery View' in order to maintain a sense of connection with their audience, although some also report that there is still a small but nevertheless noticeable lag between a performer's action and the audience's reaction that makes it hard to be properly responsive to the audience.

Regardless of these difficulties in maintaining a sense of direct interaction with their audience, the performers overwhelmingly agreed that 'talking to the audience' was important (and, for the majority, even very important), and most also thought that 'active audience participation' was very important in a digital performance. While many performers clearly also valued seeing their audience, the other performers and themselves (albeit to a far lesser degree), these elements of interactivity were somewhat less important to them:

Evidently, as a platform primarily designed for videoconferencing, Zoom lends itself to direct address to the audience and to interaction and thus to a mode of performance that is intrinsically extroverted and community-building: it may involve a screen, but that screen is designed to break through the imaginary fourth wall. Annabelle May Terry (Performer) remembers:

'Zoe's idea from the very beginning was to create a community again when we didn't have one. When the community broke down and we all went into lockdown and the theatres closed and it was dark and scary she wanted to remind people that we're all still here.'

The 'Press conference' at the start of the Tempest, with interactive prompts to the audience to ask questions of Antonio (Giles Stoakley)

Audience participation in tantalising the Neapolitan lords and ladies with food and drink

Audience participation in tantalising the Neapolitan lords and ladies with food and drink

In her approach to The Tempest, Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest) was mindful of the audience from the start, wanting to remind them of 'what it's like when we watch a show and we interact and we get that amazing feeling'. For Terry, interaction with the audience 'was amazing because I wasn't just staring into the void and acting in the void and screaming into the void and no one is listening, I could actually be comforted in the fact that, look, people are actually watching and interacting and reacting!'.

'The Tempest was a live response … where other people who were isolated as well were able to tune in and share the connection with the actors in this … space which is about trickery, it is about this insubstantial pageant and yet, for that moment until it faded we had it, and we remember the connection we felt. **- Al Barclay, Performer**

'The great thing about the Tempest, because it was the first one, it was just such an emotional event for us, for the audience … I didn't expect to feel that I was with people' **- Paul Taylor, Performer**

For Al Barclay (Performer), interaction with the audience and the community this generates goes to the heart of what makes performance on Zoom inherently theatrical:

'What is theatre? Why are we making theatre? What's the purpose of theatre? For me, it's a lot to do with bringing people together, it is to do with the sheer […] liveness of theatre, it's the fact […] that the actor could die on stage, literally, or that someone will fall off […] We're all in it together and if we're all in it together, if that's what it feels like, then how do we make that happen when all we have is a screen.'

Annabelle May Terry (Performer) also sees interaction with the audience as the essence of theatre: 'this is theatre because theatre is nothing without its audience and an audience is nothing without its performers'. For these performers, there is a self-evident connection between interaction with the audience and the experience of liveness they also see as central to the theatrical experience.

Reflecting on the difference between their interactive Tempest and other Zoom shows that are streamed 'live' via YouTube, which does not facilitate communication between audiences and performers, Al Barclay (Performer) explains that liveness is not experienced in quite the same way in the latter type of show, because the performance, despite taking place in synchrony with audience reception, 'could have been recorded six months ago. … Even though we know it is being recorded live and streamed immediately to the internet, we're watching it more or less in the moment that it's made, it all somehow doesn't feel like we meant it because we don't have the proofs that tell us that this is now.' He concludes: 'It's finding ways to keep the liveness, and to keep the connection that comes with liveness. … Because if we lose that, then it's like 'look at us, we're making a cheap TV show here''. For him, an archival recording of a performance is 'not theatre. It's just a memory.' (For points of comparison from the point-of-view of the audience, see Part 6.3 – 'Liveness, audience participation and community'; for interaction as a part of dramaturgy for Zoom, see Part 3 – 'Zoom affordances: a new performance medium').

Behavioural changes

Working from home for performers was an entirely new experience, which had a significant impact on their working patterns and approach to their work, their work/life balance, their general wellbeing and also their travel-related carbon footprint.

Work pattern:
The creative team all reported working long hours on The Tempest, with digital modes of working making it more difficult to switch off and walk away from work. For Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest), it meant that she 'work[s] a lot more hours', while Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Performer) found that, despite a seemingly lower workload because he was working on fewer concurrent projects than he is used to, his working hours ended up 'not vastly different'. Sinéad Owens (Stage Manager) explained that she is 'very used to working long days, different hours etc. so it hasn't been much of a change in that sense', with the length of her working day explained by the fact that whereas members of the cast were never rehearsing for long stretches of time, the Director and Stage Manager were rehearsing successive scenes with different performers. In fact, working on her phone and laptop extended her working day, since 'in this way of working I am always on hand to work.'

The cast, on the other hand, were shielded from excessive hours at their screens by the company's deliberate decision to limit their screen time and spread one week's worth of rehearsals over two weeks. Several members of the cast took advantage of the spare time they had as a consequence to play around with their technical equipment and with the Zoom platform and video-editing software. Performers who chose to fill their day with private rehearsals, online tech tutorials and perfecting their home studio set-up reflected that doing so and having the right equipment and knowing how to use it would help them create better quality self-tapes and prepare them for virtual auditions.

Overall, the cast and creative team for The Tempest rated the changes to their work pattern that were a result of working from home as clearly positive. Of the thirteen respondents to our survey, eleven rated the changes as 'a mostly positive experience, with some challenges but also positive changes'; one went further in rating them as 'a mostly positive experience, with some challenges but also positive changes', and only one respondent, who in interview reported finding it hard to structure the working day and make themselves get up in the morning and finish working in the evening, rated the experience as 'difficult, mostly negative.'

The largely positive response to the change can be explained on the one hand by the gains the team experienced as a result of no longer needing to travel to work, and on the other the benefits of being able to work from home rather than have to stay in 'digs'. Simon Spencer-Hyde (Performer) draws attention to the amount of time saved simply by virtue of not needing to travel to the venue: 'The hours were a lot shorter than doing a 'normal' show. Eg 7.30pm show in the flesh – I'd get to the location … at 6pm latest. But with this show, I'd sit down at my desk and log into Zoom at the half[-hour call], which would be 6.55pm.' Additionally, Madeleine McMahon (Performer) enjoyed the fact that 'It's meant I could work from home, as opposed to living away. The hours could be more broken up into manageable chunks of who was needed when'. Working from home made even simple things such as eating between shows easier for members of the cast.

However, working from home also required the cast to take responsibility for the structure of their own working day, which is something several members of the team consciously had to work on. For Rhodri Lewis (Performer), this was in part a result of the much lower level of physical energy required by performing on Zoom:

> 'I feel it has made me a bit more nocturnal than I was before, performing live physically expends energy. Working online doesn't "drain the tank" in the same way so I found myself staying up late and struggle to go to sleep. After a while I started going for long walks after the show and that seemed to help a lot.'

Other members of the team furthermore regretted the extent to which digital theatre put them 'at the mercy of the internet' (Annabelle May Terry, Performer), requiring the cast to be 'in a constant state of preparedness in case of sudden loss of a company member and the need to 'step in' for the show to continue' (Paul Taylor, Performer). Overall, then, while the change to the working patterns brought about by digital transformation was experienced as a positive development, performers also acknowledged that it required time-management skills and put them under additional pressure because they needed to be able to compensate for the vagaries of internet connectivity.

Work/life balance:

Overwhelmingly, all staff found that working from home, while bringing with it some challenges, had a positive effect on their ability to balance work and family/leisure. Creation Theatre's explicit commitment to limiting screen time for performers and making sure that rehearsals were as short and productive as possible was much appreciated by the performers, and even Stage Manager Sinéad Owens, who admits to not being 'the best at a healthy work/life balance normally' and to being 'ready to work whenever' now that physical boundaries between work and life were absent, concedes that 'Creation are great for checking in to make sure you're ok and aren't feeling pressured and they were very supportive on this project.'

'Creation are good at sticking to reasonable working hours in compliance with usual Equity contracts and this hasn't changed with the move online.' – **Ryan Duncan, Performer**

'Working from home has definitely blurred the boundaries between working and leisure hours. However I would say that Creation are excellent at respecting those boundaries and the blurring is a result of my need/ desire to continue working.' – **Giles Stoakley, Production Manager and Performer**

'Creation's rehearsal schedule whilst working from home has not been taxing or expectant at all. They understand that we are performers, we are not used to being still and looking at a screen for hours on end!' – **Annabelle May Terry, Performer**

'Creation Theatre, very early on, recognised the need to limit rehearsal/working time, due to the uniquely tiring nature of working through a screen.' – **Paul Taylor, Performer**

Members of the cast who found it difficult to 'clock off' because work was no longer physically separated from life devised individual strategies to force themselves to switch off: going for walks or for a run was a popular way of separating work from leisure, as was mentally designating the area of their home repurposed as a studio as a workplace they physically left at the end of a rehearsal or show. As Al Barclay (Performer) explains: 'I had a little area that was the show and could very easily leave it. It did mean that a section of my living room was colonised but I was living alone so it was fine.'

Ryan Duncan, a performer who was inspired by working on The Tempest to devise his own Zoom children's show Up, Up, Up and Away!, found that he ended up 'working late and at weekends' simply because he 'can suddenly make [his] own work (no cost from rehearsal space, easily access other artists to collaborate with etc.). It has been hard to build a routine because you, and the people you work with can suddenly work at any time and be flexible with other commitments.' That general availability of creative collaborators who would, in normal circumstances, be out of geographical reach and also overcommitted, was also commented on by several members of Creation Theatre and Big Telly's creative and management teams, with working across time zones becoming a potential additional pressure point. Even so, and despite the additional time she spent in rehearsals with successive members of the cast, Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest) managed for the most part to maintain a boundary between work and life: 'I have a home office and try to stay away from it in the evenings, although this isn't always possible.'

On the whole, performers relished the opportunity to work from home. Like the other members of the cast who were able to set up a studio space in a spare room, Annabelle May Terry (Performer) particularly valued the luxury of being able to shut the door on work and immediately find herself at home:

'I am in the spare bedroom of my house which I transform into a soundproof, green screened performance space! Although this has been tricky to get right, I have enjoyed being in the comfort of my own home. When I switch the laptop off at the end of the night, I can go to my own bed and relax rather than being in digs which can sometimes feel awkward, as you're often a guest in another family's home.'

Having a separate zone or room to work in was clearly an advantage when it came to maintaining a good work/life balance when working from home, as Rhodri Lewis (Performer) also emphasised: 'I am lucky enough to be doing these shows in a spare room so maintaining a balance was easy. I only worked when I entered that room, when I was out of the room I was able to switch off.'

Performers were also well aware of the strain their work could put on whoever was sharing their house and broadband connection. Giles Stoakley (Production Manager and Performer), describes the 'juggling act with space in the house and my wife's work that has to be managed.' Annabelle May Terry (Performer) was similarly mindful of the demands the production put on her partner, who gamely helped out in one scene of The Tempest in which his hand appeared on her screen. While in the instance, this did not represent a problem, Terry warns against the risk of taking such assistance for granted: 'I think […][companies] can't expect […]that everyone has people in their house to help them. […]I think they need to understand they are employing you, and not your family.' The whole team's responses made it clear that both they and the company were mindful of the strain the show was potentially putting on other members of the household who had to minimise their broadband use during performances and keep down noise levels to ensure the best possible conditions for the performers.

That this was particularly challenging for performers with children to manage is clear from Simon Spencer-Hyde's (Performer) recollection:

> 'I had to make sure I put aside really good quality time at home during the run to make up for the evenings where I was 'away' doing the show. The effect in one way is not as bad as with a 'normal' show, because at least with this Zoom performance you can be at home. However that has challenges in itself, most notably everyone else in the house has to keep noise to a minimum, or the audience might hear.'

Parents of young children were also the most likely to want to forgo social 'winding-down' sessions at the end of a performance, preferring to return to their caring responsibilities promptly at the end of the working day.

Wellbeing:

For many members of the creative team, it was difficult to disentangle their reflections about their well-being while home-working from the wider context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the community, individual mental health, and employment prospects within the theatre industry. What shone through many responses was a mixture of profound gratitude for 'the chance to work during lockdown' (Giles Stoakley, Production Manager and Performer), which the cast perceived as an unexpected lifeline at a time when they were under intense strain financially and in terms of mental health, and a recognition that working in these conditions brought its own challenges.

> 'Working during a pandemic. Our theatre industry is in crisis and more people are out of work than ever before, yet I am lucky enough to be working and being paid to work. I often have to pinch myself.' –
> **Annabelle May Terry, Performer**

For several performers, the level of connection afforded by Zoom was both a marvel and the source of frustration. Ryan Duncan (Performer) reflects that:

'while it has opened up a world of creative possibilities it has taken away the greatest joy of my work, which is face to face social interactions with audience and colleagues. I guess that's the Covid-19 effect everyone is feeling but I wonder if it is felt more acutely by us theatre lot whose work is centred around social interaction.'

For Simon Spencer-Hyde (Performer), who also missed the 'buzz' and 'camaraderie' of the dressing-room, that social interaction is key to picking up physical cues from his fellow-performers:

'I definitely prefer working with people in the flesh. When you're trying out ideas and collaborating, all sorts of signals are given and picked up by the group, both verbally and through the body that can get missed with Zoom.'

Such cues are not just given by fellow-actors, but also by the audience: Al Barclay (Performer) 'still crave[s] the back and forth' of 'being able to sense the audience and roll with their nuances'. All the same, he experienced enough of a connection with his audience through the Zoom performances that he 'felt sad to be going back to my living room' at the end of a show. For Paul Taylor (Performer), the 'daily contact with the company, albeit through a screen' was 'extremely welcome and, at points, necessary to my wellbeing.' For him, performing in The Tempest was a profoundly 'emotional event for us, for the audience' because it made him feel that he was 'with people.'

That last comment points to the emotional fragility of some members of the cast at the beginning of lockdown. Paul Taylor (Performer) explains that:

'Being able to have contact with those people that you work with and talk to… to have that back, even though it's not physical, was gorgeous. And then seeing the pain, the hurt at times, and desperation on the fellow actors' faces that do live on their own, that haven't seen another person for three months…'

The show's Director, Zoe Seaton, too, was sensitive to her cast's emotional needs and mindful that they might be dealing with difficult home situations while also trying to work. She recalls:

'We were working very early on in lockdown when people were quite frightened. And you don't know what's outside the room. When people come in you don't know what's outside, you don't know what family are there or not there or what family are poorly or not poorly or what fears they had.'

It is her awareness of the potential Covid-19-related difficulties her cast were dealing with in their private lives that motivated her to reach out to some of them individually over the telephone to offer support. The availability of such extra support, as Paul Taylor sees it, should always be part of working remotely: 'This online creativity needs to have far more of an input in our personal life because it is the only form of contact for some people. And if that's the case, that contact has to encompass personal as well as work.'

Overall, however, while the cast made no attempt to gloss over how difficult they initially found the transition to online work, they experienced being able to work at all and being able to maintain a connection with other performers, their audiences, and the theatre industry as beneficial to their wellbeing. Being able to spend more time with loved ones was an obvious well-being benefit, especially for those with children. For some, working on this production also benefited their professional development in terms of the variety of roles they have been able to tackle, the techniques they have learned, and the visibility they have gained nationally and internationally through being involved in this work.

Environmental impact:

Overwhelmingly, the creative team agreed that there had been a very significant reduction in their travel to and from work. Performers would have had to commute from London, fly in from Northern Ireland or travel down from Edinburgh and stay in digs had the show been a physical one. Some of the cast who live far away would have occasionally gone home during the course of the rehearsal period and the show's run, increasing their carbon emissions yet further.

> 'I'm barely using my car. Previously, I pack a suitcase and drive to Oxford where I stay for the duration of rehearsals/performances, with the occasional commute home on days off/food shopping etc.' – **Annabelle May Terry, Performer**

> 'The environmental benefits are an enormous reduction in miles travelled. Creation's premises are a 60 mile round trip from me so potentially 300- 400 miles a week reduction.' – **Giles Stoakley, Production Manager and Performer**

> 'I don't have to commute from London to Oxford every day with everything that entails.' – **Al Barclay, Performer**

> 'I'm not travelling to work every day, I didn't use an airplane to get there. I'm just in a small box room using one light bulb and a laptop so I'm not using as much electricity.' – **Rhodri Lewis, Performer**

Instead of having to eat out while away from home, furthermore, and use a lot of pre-packaged ready-meals that generate a lot of waste, the cast were able to cook meals and eat in a more environmentally efficient way. Ryan Duncan (Performer) explains: 'I'm cooking at home (not buying a meal deal from Tesco every other day with all of the single use packaging involved).'

Duncan also pinpoints a further environmental benefit of digital performance: 'there's no energy inefficient theatre lighting during performance', though he also concedes that his 'household energy use is through the roof.' It is beyond the scope of this report to quantify the balance between the carbon savings of no longer needing 'all the electrics (lights/sound) etc that goes into running a large scale show' (Crissy O'Donovan, Producer) and the extra energy used by performers who now each have various degrees of professional studio lighting in their own homes to light themselves. A detailed comparative analysis of either type of show in terms of lighting and energy consumption is needed to draw a reliable conclusion regarding their respective carbon footprint. The analysis the company itself has carried out to compare the carbon footprint of audiences watching the show on their private devices vs. physical audiences who travel to the shows, however, has already yielded very positive results: Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer) says that 'the reduction in travel for the audience vs their power consumption using computers to watch the show is a 99% reduction in carbon emissions.' What is amply clear from this analysis as well as the cast's reflections about travel is that the carbon savings just from that element of theatrical activity are significant and highly likely to outweigh the carbon cost of performers working from home.

Ethical and equality issues

Members of Creation Theatre and Big Telly's creative teams were sensitive to the potential inequalities that working from home might create between performers from different backgrounds. Ryan Duncan (Performer) worries that while 'Theatre has always been inaccessible to those from poorer backgrounds', this situation is compounded in an environment in which all actors have to work from their homes if they do not have the right equipment and companies do not provide performers with the computers and lights they need.

'People need to be able to afford technology to do it. The better the tech the better they can make it look.' – Al Barclay, Performer

"Those with a spare room, like me, or a private space to work online, will benefit more and have access to greater opportunities, without it impacting those they live with. As well as those with more money for equipment such as lights, microphones etc.' – Madeleine McMahon, Performer

'What you could achieve was based on the quality of your equipment and how tech savvy you were. I can imagine some people feeling left out as they have no interest in tech or don't have anything to allow them to perform.' – Rhodri Lewis, Performer

For their part, Creation Theatre were proactive in sending equipment to members of the cast who needed additional pieces of kit and in guiding them through the technological set-up of their home studio and navigating the Zoom platform. The company also provided members of the cast whose broadband was unreliable with mobile phone data cards, ensuring that they, too, could have a safety net in case their connection failed. As Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer) explains: 'I think we've done what we can to provide support to overcome any [equality issues] - sending computers and extra data to performers who need them.' However, there is nothing that a company can do to iron out inequalities that arise from a performer not having sufficient disruption-free space in their home to set up a home studio. The potential disparity in access to work depending on home space and living arrangements comes out clearly from Madeleine McMahon's comment: 'We're lucky enough to have a spare bedroom I could use as a 'studio', and my partner helped by not using the internet while I was rehearsing. Our old flat was a studio, so it would have been close to impossible.'

While there is thus a justified concern about the ways in which disparities in home environment might have a negative impact on equality of access to work even if a company supports its performers with equipment and training, working from home can also improve access to work for groups who are disadvantaged in a traditional theatre working environment. Such disadvantage, Lucy Askew (CE and Creative Producer) points out, can be simply geographical: digital homeworking makes it much easier 'for performers to work from the regions' – a point Zoe Seaton (Artistic Director, Big Telly and Director, The Tempest) also made when discussing the hurdles to employment faced by company members based in rural parts of Northern Ireland. Askew remarks 'how London centric the industry has become' and how this 'often leads actors to feel they have to live in London where cost of living is higher.' For freelancers in this situation, remote working 'could make living in more affordable areas feasible.'

Annabelle May Terry (Performer), who worked on The Tempest and is part of the cast for Alice, also pinpoints other ways in which 'this way of working is more accessible and inclusive'. She suggests that there are clear access benefits because working online is

'available to anyone and everyone at any time. I had the privilege of sitting in on Creation's Alice auditions in which they were actively seeking to diversify their casting and broaden their pool of actors of colour. It was wonderful to see so many performers getting the opportunity to showcase their talent to the company and be cast in the show as a result.'

From the standpoint of the shows' Producer, Crissy O'Donovan agrees that

'remote working actually increases opportunities in some cases and lends itself to creatives and performers who would normally have restrictions in working in regional site specific work (due to personal circumstances like carer roles, childcare, disability - that would normally prevent someone from shying away from this type of job).'

Older performers, she reflects, might shy away from work that involves learning to work with a computer and technical equipment, but she is confident that the issue can be addressed by 'making people aware that there is support within the framework of casting.' Casting, she is clear, should be based on the fit of the performer to the role and not on a performer's technical ability, the noise in their house or the amount of space they have,

'because that's excluding people … and if you have an older person who is finding it difficult, whether they feel confident enough to even apply for the job, is what the bigger issue is. … How do you create a message, or create an environment where people will feel confident enough to even apply for the job, if it's a technical job? … But I think there are ways around that, if you actually meet the actor and the actor is the right person for the job.'

With some safeguards in place (see the Guidelines that are part of the 'Digital Toolkit' of this report), digital theatre transformation therefore has the potential to level the playing field for many performers, even as it will continue to pose challenges for those who do not have sufficient space in their homes to set up a green screen studio with appropriate lighting.

Digital Theatre Transformation, Part 5: The Audience: Demographics, Marketing and Motivation and Willingness to Pay

Data sets:

The analysis of audiences in Parts 5 and 6 is based on the following data sets:

1. Box office data (provided by Creation Theatre) from the 2019 analogue performances of The Tempest, from the 2020 Zoom performances of the show in April and May, and from the live and recorded Zoom research performances in July 2020.
2. The results of a general audience survey conducted by Creation Theatre in 2019 (n=583).
3. Observations of nine recordings of the 2020 Zoom performances of The Tempest.
4. The responses to an online survey sent to audiences of the April/May Zoom performances (n=177). The anonymised responses are archived and available at https://figshare.com/articles /dataset/ Digital_Theatre_Transformation_Audience_Questionnaire_anon_xlsx/13076963
5. Transcripts of 22 audience interviews conducted over Zoom.

Audience Demographics

Size of the Zoom Audience
Box office data shows that a total of 1428 tickets were sold across 17 performances of the Zoom Tempest in April and May 2020. Physical ticket sales across the 2019 performances totalled 3368. Tickets for the Zoom shows were sold per device, rather than per person. Therefore, the number of ticket sales does not accurately reflect how many people participated in the Zoom shows. Most people purchased one ticket regardless of group size for the Zoom production. As a result, the box office data does not enable us to accurately say how many people watched.[53]

However, an analysis of the recordings of nine of the 17 performances allowed us to count the number of people visible on each screen shown during these performances (a total of 404 screens). This analysis suggested that most people watched in groups of two (42%) or alone (37%), with a further 13% watching in a group of three, and 6% in a group of four. Just six of the 404 screens contained a group of 5 (2%), with no groups larger than 5 being shown on screen. Based on this analysis, the average number of people per screen was 1.98, suggesting that a reasonable estimate for the total audience figure could be around 2827.

Audience group sizes
While these figures are based on a small proportion of the audience (around 28% of screens), the majority of the respondents to our questionnaire also said they had watched alone (41%) or with one other person (43%). A group of two was also the most common group size for the analogue performances (41%), but group sizes for the Zoom production were generally smaller with a much higher proportion of audience members watching alone (just 4% of the analogue audience visited alone). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that audiences in lockdown (in the UK at least) were unable to meet with those outside of their homes in April and May 2020, large groups sizes were far less common on Zoom.

53 Some people did book more than one ticket for the Zoom performances (13.9% purchased two, 1.9% purchased three, 0.8% four, 3.9% seven or more). In total there were 1202 customers for the Zoom performances and 1428 tickets sold.

The box office data shows that 28.9% of analogue audiences visited in groups of 6 or more, with 18% of the total audience visiting in a group of 10 or more. In contrast, just 17% of the audiences we surveyed said that they had watched the Zoom production in a group larger than 2, and none of those shown on screen watched in groups larger than 5.

However, 16% of questionnaire respondents stated that they had watched the Zoom production with friends or family who were watching in separate homes, or across multiple separate locations, suggesting that audiences were able to effectively watch in larger groups without physically being together. In interviews, audiences described being able to see other people they knew personally on screen during the performance, as well as keeping in contact with them via WhatsApp or a similar messaging system, while others spoke of having post-performance Zoom chats with friends and family (the social and communal aspects of the experience are explored in greater depth in Part 6 of this report).

It is also important to note that physical group sizes were far from fixed during the Zoom production. Screens spot-lit more than once during the performances regularly show people – especially, but not exclusively, children – appearing and disappearing from shot. The recordings contain evidence of people lurking in the background for a while, of people freely coming in and out of the room, of adults in charge of children taking turns to watch a performance, and of children falling asleep. Whilst there tended to be one or two people watching constantly throughout the performance, the freedom of audiences to move in and out of the performance and the potential of people deliberately or accidentally watching just parts of a performance should be taken into consideration when evaluating or attempting to understand the reach of an online production.

Geographical distribution of audiences:

The Zoom Tempest had a wider geographical reach than the analogue performances, both within the UK and internationally. Box office data shows that 93% of audiences of the 2019 performances were based in the UK, with the remainder of audiences coming from 11 other countries including 2% from the United States. By contrast, 83% of audiences for the April/May Zoom production were from the UK, with audiences from 27 other countries. There were significant audiences from the United States (7%), Ireland (2%) and Canada (1%), and whilst audiences for the in-person production were mostly from European countries, audiences for the Zoom production also came from Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, South Korea and Singapore among other countries.
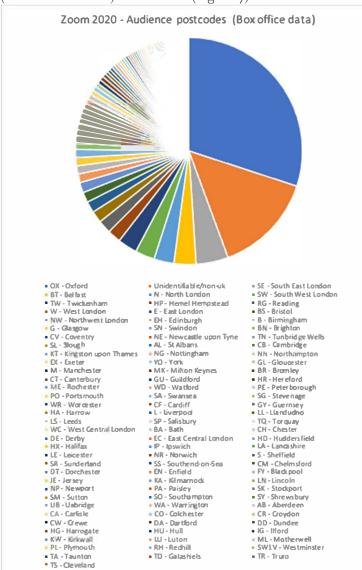
Within the UK, the overwhelming majority of audiences for the 2019 production were local to Oxford (75%), with 79% of the audience coming from South East England. Audiences travelled from all regions of the UK, with significant numbers travelling from London (3%), the East (3%) and the South West (2.5%).

The April/May 2020 Zoom performances also attracted a local audience, but a much lower percentage of the total audience (29%) were from Oxford or the South East (39%). A large percentage of the audience were from London (17%) with a particular hotspot in South East London (4%). The Zoom production mirrored the 2019 production in that there were also large numbers of audiences from the East (5%) and South West (5%), but a much greater proportion of the audience came from further afield, including from Northern Ireland (3%) where Creation Theatre's partners, Big Telly, are based. In addition to the evidence that Zoom enabled Creation Theatre to reach new international audiences, there is therefore clear evidence of the Zoom production reaching new audiences from across the United Kingdom while also continuing to cater to a core local audience.
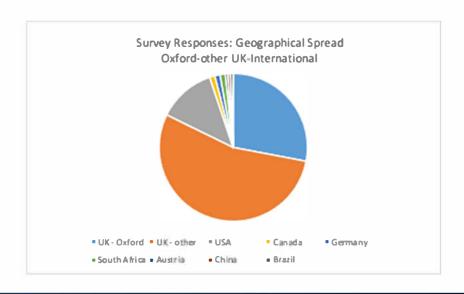
The Box Office data for the 2020 Zoom performance includes, as the second largest segment, non-UK and unidentifiable post codes. It also disaggregates London postcodes, revealing that the largest segment of the London audience came from South East London. It furthermore reveals that cultivating location-specific core audiences remains important, with significant tranches of the audience associated with Oxford
(Creation Theatre) and Belfast (Big Telly).

Zoom 2020 - Audience postcodes (Box office data)

- OX - Oxford
- BT - Belfast
- TW - Twickenham
- W - West London
- NW - Northwest London
- G - Glasgow
- CV - Coventry
- SL - Slough
- KT - Kingston upon Thames
- EX - Exeter
- M - Manchester
- CT - Canterbury
- ME - Rochester
- PO - Portsmouth
- WR - Worcester
- HA - Harrow
- LS - Leeds
- WC - West Central London
- DE - Derby
- HX - Halifax
- LE - Leicester
- SR - Sunderland
- DT - Dorchester
- JE - Jersey
- NP - Newport
- SM - Sutton
- UB - Uxbridge
- CA - Carlisle
- CW - Crewe
- HG - Harrogate
- KW - Kirkwall
- PL - Plymouth
- TA - Taunton
- TS - Cleveland

- Unidentifiable/non-uk
- N - North London
- HP - Hemel Hempstead
- E - East London
- EH - Edinburgh
- SN - Swindon
- NE - Newcastle upon Tyne
- AL - St Albans
- NG - Nottingham
- YO - York
- MK - Milton Keynes
- GU - Guildford
- WD - Watford
- SA - Swansea
- CF - Cardiff
- L - Liverpool
- SP - Salisbury
- BA - Bath
- EC - East Central London
- IP - Ipswich
- NR - Norwich
- SS - Southend-on-Sea
- EN - Enfield
- KA - Kilmarnock
- PA - Paisley
- SO - Southampton
- WA - Warrington
- CO - Colchester
- DA - Dartford
- HU - Hull
- LU - Luton
- RH - Redhill
- TD - Galashiels

- SE - South East London
- SW - South West London
- RG - Reading
- BS - Bristol
- B - Birmingham
- BN - Brighton
- TN - Tunbridge Wells
- CB - Cambridge
- NN - Northampton
- GL - Gloucester
- BR - Bromley
- HR - Hereford
- PE - Peterborough
- SG - Stevenage
- GY - Guernsey
- LL - Llandudno
- TQ - Torquay
- CH - Chester
- HD - Huddersfield
- LA - Lancashire
- S - Sheffield
- CM - Chelmsford
- FY - Blackpool
- LN - Lincoln
- SK - Stockport
- SY - Shrewsbury
- AB - Aberdeen
- CR - Croydon
- DD - Dundee
- IG - Ilford
- ML - Motherwell
- SW1V - Westminster
- TR - Truro

The graph also shows how, outside Oxford, London, Belfast, and the international audience, the audience for the Zoom show was dispersed across a large range of locations, many of which are University cities and towns. Together, these little pockets of audiences for Creation Theatre's shows across the UK constitute nearly half of its overall audience for the Zoom Tempest, suggesting that this is an important, if geographically dispersed, market for digital theatre. The respondents to our questionnaire generally mirrored the wider Zoom audience, with 82% based in the UK, and 13% based in the USA. Respondents were also based in Canada, Germany, South Africa, Austria, China and Brazil. 28% of respondents were based in the Oxford area, and 13% in London. They, too, were widely spread within England, with a particular concentration on London that almost equalled the size of the survey respondents from the US.

Survey Responses: Geographical Spread
Oxford-other UK-International

- UK - Oxford
- UK - other
- USA
- Canada
- Germany
- South Africa
- Austria
- China
- Brazil

Audience ages

Data on the age of those booking tickets was collected via the box office. The question was optional and a high percentage of audiences for both the 2019 (61%) and Zoom productions (47%) declined to provide their age. The data provided by those who did provide their age shows that the ages of those purchasing tickets for the Zoom performances broadly mirrored those who purchased tickets for the 2019 performances. This age distribution also reflects data collected by Creation Theatre in a survey of their audiences conducted in 2019, which suggested that the majority of Creation's general audience are aged between 46 and 55. The only significant, and perhaps surprising, difference was that a greater proportion of the Zoom audience were aged between 66 and 75 than the audience for the 2019 production, suggesting that the Zoom audience were actually slightly older overall than the in-person audience.

Ages of those booking tickets to the 2019 and 2020 Tempest with unknown ages removed. Source: Box Office data

The box office data, however, only provides an indication of the ages of those who booked tickets. In our analysis of the Zoom recordings, we very broadly estimated the ages of those on screen and found that as well whilst reflecting the age distribution in the box office data in there being a high proportion of adults aged between 36 and 65, a significant percentage of the audience were also under 18 (21%). This reflects the fact that many of those watching were family groups made up of adults and children or teenagers.

The ages of our questionnaire respondents broadly mirrored the distribution from the box office figures, with 29% aged between 46 and 55, 23% between 36 and 45, and 19% between 56 and 65. 17% of respondents were aged 65 to 75, and just 9% were between 26 and 35. Less than 1% were under 25 and 2% were over 75.

Gender, race and ethnicity of audiences:

Data on the gender of customers was not collected at the point of booking. Of the 177 audience members of the Zoom performances who took our questionnaire, 67% said they described themselves as women and 31% as men, with 2% preferring not to say. This is broadly similar in proportion to Creation Theatre's 2019 audience survey (n=558) where 78% stated that their gender was 'Female', 21% as 'Male' and 1% preferring not to say. It is outside the scope of this research to determine whether there is any correlation between gender and a preference for online forms of theatre, but the increased percentage of men responding to this survey suggest that this may be an interesting avenue for future research.

Data on the race and ethnicity of audiences was not collected at the point of booking, and was also not collected as part of Creation Theatre's audience survey.

158 survey respondents provided information about their race or ethnicity, with the vast majority describing themselves as White or White Other (98%).
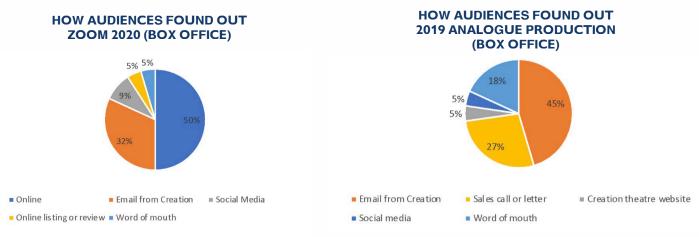
Summary: Audience Demographics
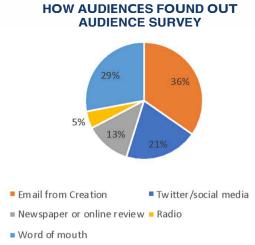
- The Zoom production of The Tempest reached an estimated audience of 2800 across 17 performances. Booking systems that report only on tickets sold mean that it is not possible to say exactly how many people watched. Adapting systems so that they capture this information may be important for companies who need to report on the reach of digital productions.
- Audiences mostly watched in small groups, with two being the most common group size. However, audiences found new ways of 'watching together' via Zoom by watching the same performance with family members and friends in different locations.
- The Zoom production had a significantly wider geographical reach than the analogue production, both within the UK and internationally.
- The audience for the Zoom production were similar in age to that for the analogue production; the slightly higher proportion of 66-75 year olds for the Zoom production suggests that the people who booked tickets for the Zoom show were slightly older.

Marketing and Audience Motivation

How audiences found out about the performances

Data on how customers heard about the event was collected via an optional survey question at the box office. The charts below show the answers given for the 2020 Zoom production and the 2019 analogue production of The Tempest. (84% of customers for the Zoom production and 67% of customers for the analogue production gave no answer, these figures have been removed from the charts below).

HOW AUDIENCES FOUND OUT ZOOM 2020 (BOX OFFICE)

Online · Email from Creation · Social Media · Online listing or review · Word of mouth

50% · 32% · 9% · 5% · 5%

HOW AUDIENCES FOUND OUT 2019 ANALOGUE PRODUCTION (BOX OFFICE)

Email from Creation · Sales call or letter · Creation theatre website · Social media · Word of mouth

45% · 27% · 18% · 5% · 5%

HOW AUDIENCES FOUND OUT AUDIENCE SURVEY

Email from Creation · Twitter/social media · Newspaper or online review · Radio · Word of mouth

36% · 29% · 21% · 13% · 5%

Audiences were much more likely to have found out about the Zoom production online, while finding out via an email from Creation was a common method across both Zoom and analogue productions. The results of our audience survey support the idea that online and email were key ways that audiences found out about the Zoom production. The survey results moreover suggest that off and online press were also important for drawing attention to the production, with respondents especially mentioning radio as a way of finding out about the production.

The high proportion of audiences who found out about the Zoom Tempest either 'online', via word of mouth, or via an email from Creation Theatre suggests that existing networks are key to the marketing, and success, of online theatre. The majority of survey respondents were already connected to Creation Theatre in some way, with 37% saying that they had seen many Creation Theatre productions and 17% saying that they had seen one Creation Theatre production in the past. These respondents mostly found out about the Zoom production via an email from the company, word of mouth, or social media.

Interviewees provided further insight into how audiences found out about the production. Interviewees who lived locally to Oxford tended already to have a relationship with Creation Theatre, had seen the company's live productions and were already on Creation's mailing lists. Those living further afield within the UK or internationally tended to have found out about the production either via media coverage (especially in The Guardian and via BBC Radio 4) or through personal or professional networks.

A number of those interviewed had a professional interest in watching the production and had found out either via word of mouth through their networks, or via social media either through special interest groups on Facebook, or on Twitter. The interest from this group is likely due to the fact that the performances of The Tempest were fairly early on in lockdown and represented some of the first examples of live Zoom theatre. Interest from this contingent of the audience may wane as digital forms of theatre become more normalised, however one interviewee, who was a video designer for theatre and had gone on to see a number of Creation's Zoom shows, explained that he had watched The Tempest as he was interested in the use of virtual backgrounds but had 'stayed for the discovery of what a delightful form of theatre it could be'.

Two interviewees also described finding the production while actively seeking out online theatre experiences. One interviewee without any professional connection to theatre explained how during lockdown he had been 'using the Internet to look for storytelling, live music and in this instance live theatre and I came across it, either on events or probably Facebook events'. Meanwhile a theatre teacher in the US described how she had been 'reading different online articles and I read about The Tempest and everything was sold out […] I just need to follow this company and find out what they do next'. In both cases, these initial experiences led the interviewees to follow the company and to engage with their ongoing digital work.

The interviewees furthermore suggest that school and education networks also played a role in audiences finding out about the production. One interviewee stated that she found out about the production through her children's school, where one of her children was studying The Tempest. Another described how personal and educational networks converged, leading her to find out about the production:

> 'I have a friend who is a theatre professor in the US and she obviously started doing all of her stuff online and was really watching everything to try and see what people were doing and to find things to show her students so she found this, and so she was sending out links. She's now on the East Coast but our kids

do Shakespeare together with this theatre company here in LA and so when she found The Tempest, and our kids had done a production of The Tempest, so she said we should all watch this thing together […] I think she sent it to a couple of other kids that were in The Tempest [audience] as well.'

This comment demonstrates how educational networks might work to reach audiences for digital work, especially for plays with an existing connection to the curriculum. A number of interviewees were also teachers in the US who were looking for ideas of how they might create online performances with their remote students.

While schools in the UK were closed during the Zoom run of The Tempest, schools offer a potentially large, and as yet, mostly untapped, audience for digital performance. Developing the networks and relationships that many theatres already have with schools may be a viable way of extending the reach and longevity of digital work going forward.

Potential to reach new audiences

The questionnaire and interview responses suggest that while existing connections with audiences are vital in marketing and attracting audiences to online shows, digital work also offers the opportunity to reach new audiences both within the UK and internationally, and to develop relationships with those audiences. The responses to our survey indicate that the Zoom production was effective at reaching audiences who were new to Creation Theatre. 32% of respondents said that they had not heard of Creation Theatre before watching the Zoom production, and a further 14% said that they had heard of the company but had never before seen a production. These respondents were more likely to have found out about the production via reviews, social media and radio as well as via word of mouth.

The initial survey responses also suggest that the Zoom production attracted some audiences who, before the lockdown, did not regularly attend live theatre performances. Whilst the majority of respondents (54%) said they attended theatre fairly frequently (around once a month or every few months) and 11% said they attended even more frequently (once a week or more), 14% of respondents said that they rarely attended (once a year).

Some respondents were also new to watching theatre in alternative formats. In our preliminary report, which was based on 93 responses by audience members who had watched the show during the first two months of the UK's full lockdown in April/May 2020, we found that most of these respondents were new to online theatre, with 17% saying that they had never watched theatre online, on television or in the cinema. 50% reported that whilst they had seen theatre in the cinema or on television, they had never seen theatre online. 27% had some familiarity with online theatre, saying that they had seen some theatre productions online, while 5% were very familiar, having seen lots of theatre online.

When that earlier data set is combined with that of respondents who answered our questions having seen a performance of The Tempest in early July 2020, the percentage of respondents who said that they had seen some theatre online (38%) or lots of theatre online (12%) is much higher than the figures recorded in our initial report. 15% of respondents now said that they had never watched theatre online, on television or in the cinema before watching The Tempest. A further 34% (down from the 50% recorded in our preliminary report) said that before watching The Tempest, they had seen theatre broadcasts in the cinema or on television, but never online. This suggests that audiences generally encountered more online theatre as Covid-19 restrictions on physical theatregoing continued into June and July 2020.

Although the majority of interviewees were relatively regular theatre attendees before lockdown, the interviews shed interesting light on the impact of the production on less enthusiastic theatregoers. One interviewee who described himself as 'more of a cinema-goer than a theatre-goer', said that he was put off London theatre by the cost, but that he also felt he suffered from a 'sort of inertia' when it came to booking tickets, explaining that despite (and perhaps because of) the availability of theatre in London, he rarely got around to organising trips. In contrast, he felt that watching the Zoom Tempest felt 'like an easier thing to do' and that it was 'no harder than putting Netflix on'. Initially attracted to the ease of booking and watching, as well as to the opportunity to watch live with a friend living in another country, he described how he enjoyed the distinctiveness of the format and the experience, leading him to attend a number of Creation's subsequent Zoom productions.

Other interviewees described watching with partners and family members who were not keen theatregoers, and being surprised at their engagement with the production:

> *'I booked the tickets thinking that I might well watch it on my own and my husband was thinking if I watched it with my daughter that would be a nice hour for him, you know this was in middle of lockdown so you're all together all the time […] but in the event I think for whatever reason we all sat down to watch it together and he really enjoyed it and my daughter who I didn't think would enjoy it really got kind of engaged and drawn into it'*
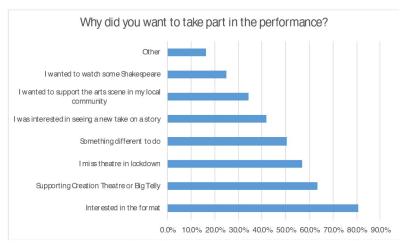
This interviewee went on to explain that having watched the production, her husband had become 'quite evangelical about how innovative and creative it is and how other theatres need to follow suit and that's the way they are going to survive' saying that he had transitioned from being 'sort of slightly dubious to thinking this is the way forward', suggesting that the short running time of the production was a 'big plus' for him. She even went so far as to wonder whether he would ever want to go back to a traditional theatre, explaining that rather than making him want to go and see live theatre, the fact that he had 'seen that you can do it a different way' meant that he now had less of an interest in 'going and sitting on a hard seat for two hours'.

These comments illuminate two ideas related to the ability of digital transformation in engaging new audiences. Firstly, that the capacity for digital performance, and the 'price-per-device' model in particular, to open up 'casual' or 'accidental' encounters with the performance presents interesting opportunities for engaging audience members of a household who may not have intended to watch the full production, or who would not have purchased a ticket for the live production. Secondly, the comments highlight that the affordances and benefits of a digital format can be what particularly engages a 'new' audience member, whether that is the relative ease of booking a ticket, the sense of intimacy and participation, or the absence of hard seats. As is reflected in other interviews and survey responses, and is discussed in further detail below, audiences tended to see Zoom theatre as a distinct experience, with its own benefits and opportunities, rather than as an equivalent, or lesser, replacement for the in-person experience. This suggests that, as the example above illustrates, Zoom theatre or digital theatre more broadly, can be an effective way of engaging new audiences with theatrical work. It also suggests that new audiences of this format may not necessarily translate to new audiences for in-person theatre when it returns.

Audience Motivation

We asked our questionnaire respondents to select from a list of potential motivations for wanting to take part in the Zoom performances. Interest in the format was the most commonly selected reason (79%), indicating that the novelty of the form may have been a key factor in attracting audiences. 61% of respondents said that missing theatre during lockdown was a reason for participating, and 57% said that they were motivated by a desire to support Creation Theatre or Big Telly (33% were motivated more generally by a desire to support the arts scene in their local community). 46% said that they wanted to take part because it offered something different to do in lockdown. The content was slightly less of a motivation for respondents: 40% said they wanted to see a new take on a story and 31% said they wanted to watch some Shakespeare, suggesting that audiences were motivated to participate more by the experience and the opportunity to support the company, than by the content of the production.

Survey responses to 'Why did you want to take part in the performance?'

The comments left by respondents who selected 'other' and the interviews provide more in-depth insight into audience motivation.

A number of respondents and interviewees were motivated by professional interest – either as industry professionals, academics, or teachers – to participate in the production. Those who were professionally involved in the theatre industry included theatre makers, directors, actors and designers, many of whom said that they were either already working with Zoom, or were looking at it as an option. These respondentswatched hoping to gain inspiration for their own work:

> *'there wasn't much at that time basically and I was intrigued as to how people were doing it' (student and theatre maker)*

> *'just as we were thinking oh we'll have to not use Zoom, or use Zoom for rehearsals but find some other playground to film it in we suddenly heard about the Creation piece which suddenly opened it up again' (artist/director)*

> *'I think that's what took me professionally to go and watch The Tempest having read about the way they use, like virtual backgrounds in Zoom. So I kind of came for that and then stayed for the discovery of what a delightful form of theatre it could be' (video designer)*

Those respondents who were educators also cited the hope for inspiration to inform their own online work with students as a motivation for watching. Three of the interviewees were theatre teachers in the US, whose personal reasons for watching the show overlapped with their role as teachers who were

having to rapidly adapt their teaching programmes and school performances to online delivery. Both teachers and industry professionals cited the innovative format, and the live delivery of the show, as a particular reason for engaging with The Tempest. For example, one teacher told us that 'the element of it being live and using Zoom' was her main reason for watching, stating that she 'was already kind of involved with a lot of Zoom play readings, but the fact that […] it was successfully being a more full-fledged production […] is why I wanted to check it out. And then […] after I saw that first one I was absolutely hooked so anything that they do, I will be there'.

The format of the show was also a major attraction for audience members without any professional connection to the theatre industry. Some interviewees described the difference between the Zoom format and other types of online theatre as a motivation, with the liveness of the performance being a particular attraction because it enabled a communal experience during lockdown. One interviewee explained that being able to watch the show virtually with a friend in a different country was a big reason for participating in the show:

> 'I sort of texted her to say do you want to virtually go to the theatre with me, and so being able to share it with her, who is obviously five thousand miles away was quite exciting and I guess that's obviously something you don't get with live theatre, is to share the live experience with somebody, wherever they might be in the world'

Similarly, an interviewee whose family member was involved creatively in the show described how the Zoom show was

> 'one of the first times I've been able to see something that she's done creatively because I'm abroad […] so yeah for me it was great because now I was like wow I can see something and other friends of our family now who are not local to her and can't travel to it can actually see the work that her and the company are producing so it was pretty cool!'

Another interviewee in the US, who saw the production a total of four times, described a more general sense of connection as her motivation for coming back to the show. Whilst she initially participated because she knew someone in the cast, she told us that she continued to book because 'it was like a community, it felt very community to me, so I really just loved the experience […] it was the only thing I participated in this whole pandemic that was community like that, I mean no one else did anything like that when it is live and interactive'.

As well as the ability to connect across a distance, audiences also described the desire to participate in a shared experience with their household as a reason for participating. Questionnaire respondents wrote that they 'wanted to share the experience with family' and that it was something the 'whole family could enjoy together'. These comments suggest that social and communal experiences are not just an impact or effect of this format (see Part 6 below), but are elements that audiences are actively looking for in online theatre experiences.

A previous connection with Creation Theatre and/or Big Telly were also motivating factors discussed in more depth by interviewees and questionnaire respondents. Respondents cited previous experiences with Creation Theatre, or specifically with the 2019 analogue production, as reasons for wanting to participate, saying that they 'know that Creation productions are generally creative and brilliant', that they had 'wanted to see THIS production', and that they 'saw the original performance last summer, and [were] interested

to see how it transferred to online'. Others stated that their desire to support Creation Theatre through lockdown was a big factor in their motivation to participate. One interviewee described how participating in the show represented 'something a bit different to do in lockdown' but that she

> 'also wanted to support Creation […] so it was the combination of wanting something to do and the pedigree of Creation making me think you know, this is going to be interesting […] I knew I wouldn't be disappointed […]. Perhaps if I got an email from a different theatre group suggesting that kind of thing I wouldn't have responded in the same way, but it was the reputation that kind of came before them so I knew we would be in for a treat'

For this audience member, the combination of both wanting something to do in lockdown, and knowing, based on previous experience of Creation, that the show was likely to be interesting, motivated her to participate. This sentiment was reflected by another interviewee who said that as regular theatregoers her family were 'missing the theatre experience at the moment' and that their main reason for participating

> 'was because it was Creation Theatre and I knew from visiting Creation productions before how good they are so I knew that it was likely to be good. I didn't want to pay for something that wasn't kind of what I had experienced before.'

These comments illustrate the importance of striking a balance between innovation and familiarity when transforming work digitally. While the novelty of the format was clearly a strong draw for audiences of the Zoom Tempest, there is also evidence that audience members made a decision to watch based on their previous experiences of the company, and that they were looking for a fairly similar experience that they were reasonably sure they would enjoy.

A number of other comments underscore the role of familiarity as a deciding factor for audiences. Although fewer respondents said that content (Shakespeare or the take on a story) was a reason for them wanting to take part, the choice of play was mentioned as important by a number of interviewees, with one interviewee saying his main reason for watching was because The Tempest was his favourite Shakespeare play. The choice of play was especially important for respondents who said they watched because their children were studying The Tempest or another Shakespeare play:

> 'it was definitely to help the kids. Frankly we were all so happy for something different to do, but the original [reason] was really to help them have a better understanding or a different view of [the play]'

> 'I think the main reason I chose it was it was The Tempest, a Shakespeare play that my daughter was studying and that was important for her to see a different abridged version and it was a story we were familiar with. I think if I had chosen something from Creation Theatre that I wasn't sure what it was, I most likely wouldn't have gone to it so it was something I was familiar with and happy to know what the storyline was'

Clearly then, whilst not important to all, familiar content worked to attract some audiences to the format, both in terms of reducing the risk for audiences who might be unsure, and in terms of presenting content that is linked to the curriculum and therefore presents a quasi-educational experience for families.

Summary: Marketing and Audience Motivation

- Audiences mostly found out about the Zoom Tempest online or via an email from Creation Theatre, with existing audience networks key to the marketing of online performances. School/education networks could represent a potential market for Zoom theatre going forwards.
- The Zoom production was effective at reaching audiences who were new to Creation Theatre and there was also evidence that it attracted audiences who were previously infrequent theatre attendees. However, there is also some evidence that Zoom theatre is developing audiences for this particular format who may be less interested in seeing in-person theatre.
- Audiences have encountered more online theatre during lockdown, and more audiences are therefore now familiar with online theatre than at the start of lockdown.
- Audiences were motivated to watch The Tempest both by the novelty of the form and their previous knowledge of Creation, highlighting the need to balance familiarity and innovation in the marketing of online theatre.
- Audiences were also motivated by the opportunity to connect with others through the performance
- Audiences suggested that their enjoyment of the experience would motivate them to watch Zoom theatre in future.

Value for Money, Pricing Models and Willingness to Pay for Zoom Theatre

Price-per-device vs donations

Our research on Value for Money involved two bespoke research performances: the first, a live interactive performance on Saturday 10 July, which was recorded; the second, a broadcast of the 10 July show recording the following day. The second research performance did not include any opportunity for audience interaction but instead allowed viewers to see the previous day's audience interacting with the show on the recording. For the two research performances in July, tickets were offered on a donations model (with a suggested donation of £20, the standard ticket price for the show), with no obligation to donate. For the live Saturday performance,142 devices were booked, and 43 donations were made (by 30% of the bookers) totalling £758.50. For the recorded performance on Sunday there 69 devices were booked and 17 donations were made (by 25% of the bookers) totalling £325.00. For a regular pay-per-device show at the standard £20 per device ticket price, the live performance would have generated a net box office income of £2840, while the recorded performance would have brought in an additional £1380. Asking for donations instead of relying on a pay-per-device ticketing system therefore resulted in a 74.32% reduction in the income generated from the performance, with an average donation of £5.34 per booked device for the live performance dropping to £4.71 per booked device for the recorded version.

The box office data clearly indicates that the gains, when recording a show and marketing the recording, from not having to pay performers and backstage creatives for repeat performances, are outweighed by the losses that come from a significantly reduced demand for recorded material (the 51.41% drop in demand from 142 tickets for the live show down to 69 for the recorded show), and additional drop in the perceived value for money of the recorded show (down 11.82% from £5.34 to £4.71 per ticket).

Audience views on value for money

We asked our survey respondents to provide a free text response to whether they felt their experience of the Zoom Tempest was good value for money. We also asked participants who had been asked for a donation to watch the research performances to comment on what they donated and why.
The significant majority of those that gave an answer said that they felt that their experience of the Zoom

Tempest was good value for money, with 45% simply replying that they felt the experience was good, or very good, value for money and a further 37% that they did feel it was good value for money, but providing further explanations in their responses. 8% mentioned that they felt that the £20 per device ticket price for a standard show was a slightly too expensive.

The comments given by respondents on this question suggest that audience attitudes to ticket prices and the factors that influence thinking around deciding to purchase tickets to digital experiences are complex and highly variable. In our initial report, which only contained data on audiences who had paid the standard ticket price, we identified four key factors that emerged as particular influences on how audiences made decisions around the value of Zoom theatre (the context of lockdown, the quality and form of the show, the price-per-device ticketing model and comparisons with other theatre experiences). Our analysis of the full set of survey responsesand interviewshas identified a number of other factors, providing a more nuanced picture of audience assessments of value.

Supporting Theatre

The most commonly mentioned aspect respondents provided in their answers to this question was that they felt that their ticket purchase was a way of supporting the companies, or was supporting theatre more widely, during a period of difficulty. Framing their ticket purchase as an act of support had an impact on how these respondents perceived the ticket price:

> 'Yes, as I'm always happy to support Creation, I watch their Summer performances almost every year, I wanted to support their venture'

> 'Yes — given that I wanted to support live theatre'

> 'Good value for money, especially as it was supporting the Creation Theatre'

Supporting the company was also a major factor for audiences who watched the research performances and chose how much to donate:

> 'I paid £30 for me and my husband, and felt it was good value for money. But I wasn't just paying for one performance — I was paying to support the company, too'

> 'I made a donation of £20 because I wanted to support the arts'

> 'I paid the amount of a full ticket because I want to support Big Telly's company — the director, stage manager, and actors deserve to be paid for their work'

> 'Paid £50. It was good value for money. Theatre as with other parts of the economy are so badly affected by Covid that wanted to contribute and help in some way. Have seen many Creation productions over the years in Oxford and all bring back happy memories, so wanted to support the company by attending and donating'

Many of these audience members felt that the experience represented good value for money anyway, with the opportunity to provide support in a tangible way adding extra value to the experience. However, some respondents suggested that they would have found the ticket price expensive without the knowledge that they were helping the company out:

'Understanding that Creation Theatre is struggling to keep going, I was happy to pay the ticket price (I think I paid £18 or thereabouts) but I know it was quite expensive for about an hour's performance'

'I paid £20 in April — this seemed slightly steep, but I was happy to pay it for the chance to support the company and see what Zoom theatre might look and feel like. I don't think I'd be up for seeing lots of Zoom performances at that price point though'

'I paid £20 as a donation to Creation Theatre's work — I wouldn't generally pay that much for an online performance but wanted to support the company in difficult times'

For these audience members, the price was acceptable, but only because they knew that they were supporting the companies, suggesting that outside of the context of lockdown, they may be less happy to pay as much for Zoom theatre.

The interview responses also illustrate that while the desire to support the work can be a major influencing factor, this desire often intersects with a matrix of other factors that audiences consider when deciding to purchase a ticket or to donate.

One interviewee, who is a theatre artist, explained that her decision about what to donate was influenced by her own personal circumstances and professional interests, the ticketing model, comparisons between Zoom theatre and other online theatre models, as well as the desire to support the company:

'I actually did give a donation […] I did see the £20 thing and I thought that's too much. One, I'm a disabled person so I would get concessions at the theatre. Two, I'm only one person watching it on one device so I ended up giving what I thought was fair, which was a tenner, and that was a very difficult thing, but then I was trying to argue with myself that a company like Creation you kind of wanted to support them to be able to continue but I guess you want to with many of the big ones as well […]. I've seen a few of the National Theatre Live ones where you could just watch it for free, but then I thought it's very different because they are showing a recorded thing and this is something live which they are doing now for us so let's show some appreciation but yeah I did think £20 was quite steep. But then again, for families where you could technically divide it between them […] I guess again, my answer is in two minds. I didn't want it to put me off, it almost did and then I thought it through and thought no, actually you don't have to pay that, they are not going to know but it will be nice to show your appreciation to be able to give something'

Another interviewee also described the quite complex decision-making that went into her deciding how much to donate:

'I was a little bit hesitant because I knew that Creation was a very good theatre company having had experience of it before but I wasn't quite sure how a theatre would be shown on Zoom, obviously I'd only done Zoom for meetings. So I was a little bit cautious of paying too much and then almost thinking I'm going to be let down by it. But I also had that scenario thinking actually I want to support the theatre and give my donation like I've given a donation to another theatre while they've been shut. But it's kind of like "how much do you pay that you feel balanced right?" because I am at home, I haven't got the overhead cost but they probably have some costs, they are at home, but it was a very difficult one to balance between giving enough as a donation but also benefitting from the play itself and whether it would be value worth paying the £20 and also because I have a child, obviously

children's prices can be reduced in some performances, so I kind of justified it on that, that I thought well I'm not a whole family, I'm not two adults, I'm an adult and a child.'

Here again, the impetus to support the theatre company is balanced with not knowing what the experience would actually entail, a consideration of the ticketing model, and comparisons with the costs of in-person theatre-making and theatre-going. These comments are worth quoting at length as they demonstrate that while we've identified a number of key factors that influence decision-making around price, in practice these factors intersect in quite complex ways in the judgements that audiences make around the value of online theatre experiences.

Price-per-device', ticketing models and personal circumstances

The second most-commonly mentioned reason for thinking that the experience was value for money was the 'price-per-device' ticketing model, and the fact that the one cost could be shared among all of those watching:

'Yes. Especially as the cost is per device not per viewer'

'Yes, as we were a whole family watching for the single fee'

'Yes. Paid £20 for household of 3 people'

'The price was very reasonable for two people with no further expenses'

'Yes – as we could watch with whole family'

'I was happy to contribute £40, as a) I enjoy the Tempest, b) want to encourage Creation to keep innovating c) that is what seemed about right for two people'

For those watching in groups, then, the price-per-device was an attractive model, and contributed to their feeling as though the experience was good value for money, especially in comparison to the usual costs involved in a family theatre trip.

Those watching alone had more mixed views on the pricing model. Many still felt that the experience represented good value for money, even watching alone:

'Yes, good value for money even though I was watching alone in my house'

'I think it was fine, it means that I'm paying more than friends who are watching it in 2s and 3s or whatever but I thought that the price was not unreasonable'

Others were reasonably happy with the price, but felt that £20 would be the maximum they would be happy to pay as an individual:

'Yes. I paid previously for 3 Creation shows and the 20 pound ticket price feels really fair. I do think if it was much more expensive I might hesitate to pay for every show UNTIL I could get a larger group together to watch (so we could each contribute some payment.)'

One questionnaire respondent noted that they felt it was 'slightly on the expensive side for one viewer', and one interviewee who watched alone noted that she felt £20 was expensive to watch alone, explaining that:

> 'if I had a family of four then sure [it would be fairer], but how can you know who is going to be watching on their own or watching on a device, so it's prejudiced against single people and that I feel is really unfair.'

The same interviewee, who was a student, noted in her questionnaire she thought '£20 was a bit too much for a student to pay' and suggested that 'there could be tiered pricing available'. The lack of concessionary pricing structures was also mentioned by another interviewee who said that as 'a single OAP' he 'would normally get a concession on £20' and said that paying £20 plus a £2.50 booking fee for Alice 'takes me out of my financial comfort zone'. Similarly the interviewee quoted at length above noted that as a disabled person she would 'usually get concessions at the theatre'. Whilst concessionary policies are obviously complicated to implement remotely, working out a way to do this could be one way of ensuring that online theatre remains accessible to a wide spectrum of audience members.

Relatedly, personal circumstances were also a factor in the assessments audiences made around value for money, as well as their ability to participate in the first place. Questionnaire respondents mentioned that the research performances had allowed them to see something that they otherwise would not have been able to afford:

> 'It was great to have the opportunity to watch a live performance without having to pay — I have lost most of my income due to the Covid-19 crisis and am struggling to manage financially'

> 'I am on a low, pandemically-challenged income and did not donate for this one. I have paid to see/experience The Time Machine and I will be paying to see/experience Alice'

Budgeting in the current economy was also something discussed by interviewees, with audiences explaining that they were having to make difficult decisions about what to spend money on, especially in relation to leisure activities. One interviewee, for example, explained that her current budget would have an impact on the type of theatrical content she would pay to watch online:

> 'if it's not appropriate for my children then it would be difficult to justify especially at this time when my income has reduced because actually you have to justify the amount of money that you are paying so perhaps £20 on my own for one device would be a lot of money.'

Another interviewee explained that she would not be prepared to pay for Zoom theatre because she is unemployed and 'trying to be conservative about what I spend my money on'. These comments serve as a reminder that the current financial environment within which theatre is struggling also has an impact on audiences and the decisions they are able to make about what experiences to support and pay for. Overall, the comments also reveal a tendency, on the part of audience members, to think of value for money not solely in terms of the need for a theatre company to cover its overheads and pay practitioners, but almost more so in terms of their own individual circumstances and ability to afford the ticket price. This suggests a need for companies to clearly explain ticket prices in terms of the cost of staging live performances; it also suggests that concessions continue to be a factor in widening access to live arts.

Valuing the Unknown

A cluster of respondents said that they initially felt that the show was expensive but, having now experienced it, believe that it was good value for money. One respondent wrote that they participated initially to 'support the company' but that 'having seen the quality of the show […] felt it was worth the money'. Similarly, other respondents said that having been initially sceptical about the price of tickets, they were won over by the quality of the show:

'Thought it was pricey at first, but once I realised the quality of the experience, it seemed very fair'

'I was put off a bit at first by how expensive it was [. .] when I saw the show, however, I changed my mind and thought that it was well worth paying that much for an online show'

'I felt that it was a risk to pay £20 but ended up satisfied by the show and pleased to contribute'

'I paid £10 for 2 people (1 adult, 1 child aged 12 years). I was unsure to what to expect and the quality of the performance so did not want to pay any more on this occasion as this was the first time seeing theatre in this way. The performance exceeded expectations so I would be now happy to pay more to the Creation Theatre next time'

'Yes, when buying the ticket I thought it was a bit expensive but worth it to support a local theatre company, whereas after attending the performance I also felt that the experience itself was worth the price'

Interviewees also spoke of being unsure of how to value a Zoom show before experiencing it. One interviewee said that she 'was a little bit hesitant' because she 'wasn't quite sure how a theatre would be shown on Zoom'. Another interviewee explained that in order for her to pay to watch a Zoom show from a different company,

'the price would have to be low enough initially that I would invest in something I wasn't sure about and then there would have to be a level of trust there in what I'm going to see to continue'

Introducing audiences to this format so that the level of entry is low enough for them to take a risk on purchasing a ticket may therefore be key to developing audiences for online work, with many of those who were initially sceptical going on to purchase further tickets.

Whilst not being familiar with the format itself was an initial barrier for some audiences, interviewees also explained that a lack of clarity about where their money was going in terms of labour and overheads was a stumbling block for them in being able to assess the value of the work before they had seen it. This is perhaps more important within the context of Covid-19, where audiences are both stretched financially, and more aware of how the money they spend and donate is used. For example, one interviewee said that she did not fully understand whether the actors and creative team in The Tempest were being paid:

'you don't know if they are doing it on a voluntary nature or whether they are doing it to keep the Creation Theatre going […] you don't know what your money really goes to on the theatre. It's quite an interesting concept thinking about that now. You just pay the money upfront and you don't really think what it's for, we do it for entertainment factor and we do it because that's what I've always done, but until now I've never really given it much thought, what our money goes towards.'

For this audience member, this lack of transparency was exacerbated by the digital format of the show, and she went on to suggest that indications of what the ticket price went towards at the point of booking could be helpful:

> '*by contributing £5 you are helping out towards whatever, by giving £10 you're helping out to do something else…it's that kind of breakdown, being aware of what your money is going towards. I don't know what my money went towards on that kind of theatre, you know when you go to the theatre you pay for the overheads of that theatre, keeping it in survival, it's not being aware of what Creation Theatre is using the money for really.*'

Although many respondents were keen to vocalise their belief that online work should be paid for, digital work suffers at the point of sale from the fact that it exists in a context where a large amount of content is made freely available to the user, and the labour that goes into producing content is largely invisible.

Indeed, having seen the show, a number of respondents cited the amount of labour that went into the production as a reason for feeling as though the experience was good value for money:

> '*it was very good value for money – it was a live experience with both actors and support staff making the technology work, and all of that labour (and the labour of the director) was very visible and impressive!*'

> '*it was very good value for money, given the amount of planning and creativity that went into it*'

> '*At £11 each, that's very good value for any kind of theatre, given the costs of production these days for company wages, audio-visual costs, props and costumes*'

One audience member had initially been put off watching The Tempest by the price, but had then paid to see a later Zoom production and had watched the recorded research performance. In the interview, she explained that an awareness of the labour involved in the show, and how the experience was different from watching a film or a recording, changed her mind about the value of the experience:

> '*I think I can imagine a lot of people will probably say "oh it's just like a video, why are you watching it and why do you have to pay to dial into a teleconference?" But I think particularly now that I've seen the Time Machine I'm like ok it is like a production with actors and a set and lines and technical support, so you're not just paying to watch a film, where you might be like I'd expect to pay £5 to rent a film for the night. So I think it was more being aware that this is a production in its own right, it's not just like a playback of something.*'

These comments suggest that audiences may be more willing to pay for Zoom shows once they've experienced them and have a clearer idea of the labour they are paying for, and a sense of where the money from ticket sales is going. This cluster of responses confirms that greater transparency regarding ticket prices and communication regarding the labour involved in producing live online work before or at the point of sale may encourage audiences to pay for online theatre experiences.

Liveness and Length

The fact that the show was performed live over Zoom was also mentioned by respondents as a reason for feeling that the show was good value for money. Reflecting on her decision regarding what to donate, one interviewee said that she had

> 'seen a few of the National Theatre live ones where you could just watch it for free but then I thought it's very different because they are showing a recorded thing and this is something live which they are doing now for us so let's show some appreciation.'

For this audience member, then, the live online experience is deemed of greater potential value than watching a recording of a show. This sentiment was reflected by another interviewee, who had watched the broadcast of a recording of the previous day's live Zoom show. When asked if she would pay to watch a recording of a Zoom show again she replied:

> 'If it were pre-recorded […] I would want it to still be free because I think the main part of the Zoom theatre experience is the live show and I would consider buying a ticket for that live show as I would a live theatre production, because there's that part of it that you are part of the production right, and that kind of collective experience is what we want in the theatre anyway and even though I didn't experience that I do realise I would value it more than just watching a recording because there's something now lost.'

Locating the value of liveness in the ability to actively participate as part of a community, this interviewee suggests that she would be more willing to pay for live online experiences than she would be for pre-recorded versions of theatre (for more on liveness and community, see Part 6; for liveness and audience participation from the performers' viewpoint, see Part 4 Section 2).

While the liveness of the experience was more likely to make audiences feel that the experience was good value for money, the relatively short running time of the show (which our research with Creation Theatre's practitioners revealed is a key strategy to avoid Zoom fatigue, see Part 3 Section 7), was mentioned as something that made audiences think that the price point was slightly too high:

> 'I thought it was little expensive for a one hour performance'

> 'I think it was a little steep given the length of the show'

> 'I chose to pay £15 as a "donation." If I had known that the performance lasted little more than an hour, I would probably have contributed £10'

> 'For an hour, as someone watching on my own, I'd probably expect to pay between £5 and £12'

The connection between the length of the show and the value of the experience is an interesting one, potentially bound up with the ideas about the value of labour discussed above, as well as with comparisons to other theatre experiences (discussed below). As a counterpoint, one questionnaire respondent wrote that 'it was a shorter show than if it had been in a venue, but this was fine, as it would have been difficult to focus for much longer, viewing from a PC'. This illustrates the challenge that online productions face in maintaining a balance between creating an experience that is long enough to be deemed valuable in terms of cost, and ensuring that it is short enough to maintain the focus of an audience who are watching in a potentially distracting environment (see Part 6 Section 1 for more on distractions). The responses suggest that more transparent communication regarding the running time of Zoom shows and the phenomenon of 'Zoom fatigue' may be important in marketing Zoom shows.

Comparisons with Other Theatre Experiences

Respondents also mentioned how the Zoom experience compared in terms of cost with the in-person theatre experience, suggesting that this was part of their value assessments. These comparisons tended to be in favour of Zoom theatre, with respondents noting that the experience was cheaper than live theatre:

> 'much more affordable than in-person live theatre'
>
> 'I believe I paid £20 which I thought was fine -- I would pay that or more for a live performance and I didn't even need to travel'

However, the interviews illustrated that the perception of whether £20 was expensive or not tended to be rooted in the types of live theatre that audiences were used to watching and paying for. For example, one interviewee explained that she was 'used to paying for fringe theatre and I'm used to paying for cutting edge theatre at £12 a ticket or something, I go to the VAULT festival and I pay £12 to £15 and I'm used to racking up and watching lots'. This experience shaped her sense of value, and she suggested that £12 would be her cap for watching online theatre.

At the other end of the spectrum two other interviewees, both based in the US, expressed their surprise at how cheap the tickets were. One even suggested that she felt the company were undercharging and said that she would be willing to spend up to $40 for a Zoom show, since she was used to paying much higher ticket prices to see live theatre in New York:

> 'if I'm going to a show in NYC I'm not getting anything for less than $100 usually. I mean I pay $100 to see a play, and I'm talking about even the last one I saw that was Off-Broadway was just over $100 and that was a little small theatre so not cheap.'

Similarly, another US interviewee explained that even at her closest theatre in Atlanta the ticket prices were more expensive than most of the shows that she went to when she visited the West End in London, and that she therefore felt that paying £20 for a ticket represented very good value for money.

Audience members therefore clearly have different views on ticket prices, a difference that is exacerbated by the international market that Zoom theatre provides potential access to. Balancing the expectations of a local audience, and ensuring that they are not priced out, with the potential of a wider audience who may be willing to pay slightly more may represent a challenge for companies looking to charge for online theatre.

As well as comparing Zoom theatre to in-person theatre, respondents also made comparisons with other online theatre experiences when reflecting on financial value. The availability of free online theatre while venues remained closed during the Covid-19 pandemic was frequently mentioned in their answers:

> 'Yes but given the quality of online content currently available for free the price might put me off in future'

> 'It's tricky because most online performances are being offered for free – which is great for [the] current situation and means I am watching more diverse work –- however I think we should be paying artists for their work and I mostly give a donation anyway'

> 'It was expensive, particularly against a plethora of free online work — however this was something very different to pre-recorded work online, and I felt so inspired I've no complaints. For a wider

audience — especially beyond the local area with an expected ticket price — a smaller amount would be welcome. I'm very happy to pay for online work and think it's important that a precedent is set that it is still something to be paid for, but was aware of peers I spoke to about the work being put off by the price, especially at that time of loss of income and uncertainty.'

These comments reflect the complex position that Zoom theatre holds in the wider, rapidly expanding, landscape of online theatre. These audiences' reflections suggest that even as Creation Theatre's and Big Telly's Zoom productions distinguish themselves through their emphasis on liveness and audience participation, they continue to operate alongside and compete for attention with freely available work disseminated online.

Whilst these views represent a challenge in terms of monetisation, the comments from respondents also demonstrate their continued willingness to pay for work:
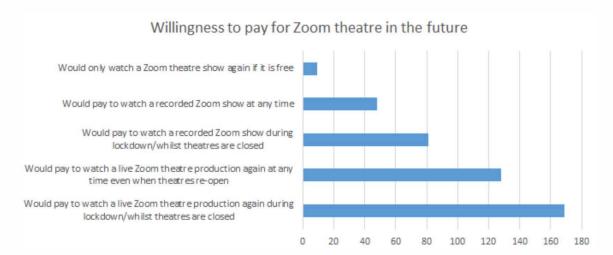
'obviously during lockdown there are a lot of creative organisations who have given away content for free, which has been amazing, and it's been so that they can survive. But I think that creative people should be paid for what they do and I really don't believe we should be in a culture where you just take, and it needs to be something that has to be valued and if you pay for it, you value it.'

Whilst this willingness to pay is not surprising, given that the majority of these respondents have already paid for at least one online theatre experience, this also reflects findings from Indigo's nationwide audience survey After the Interval: Act Two (see the Introduction to this report). The survey shows that of those who are interested in digital content, 79% would be willing to pay at least something for it (Baker Richards). The box office receipts, the survey data and the interview responses clearly suggest that a majority of audiences are willing to pay for digital performances. Our research, in combination with the findings of the Indigo survey, shows that with clear communication to manage expectations regarding running time and to offer transparency about the labour involved in producing live work, along with potential concessions, a pay-per device ticketing model as employed by Creation Theatre is financially viable.

Willingness to Pay for Zoom Theatre

This section explores what audiences of The Tempest said about their willingness to pay for Zoom theatre in future, and looks at the factors that are influencing that willingness.

Overall, our survey responses suggest that audiences are willing to pay for Zoom theatre:

Willingness to pay for Zoom theatre in the future

95% of our survey respondents said that they would be willing to pay to watch a live Zoom theatre production again during lockdown or whilst theatres were closed, and 72% said that they would pay to watch a live Zoom theatre production again at any time, even when theatres were re-opened. There was less willingness to pay to watch a pre-recorded Zoom show whilst theatres are closed (46%), or at any time (27%). Only 5% said that they would only watch a Zoom show again if it was free.

This high degree of willingness to pay for Zoom theatre reflects the findings of Indigo's After the Interval: Act Two report, which found that not only are the majority of audiences willing to pay something for online theatre, but that they are more willing to pay for events that are created specifically to be consumed online. Their results indicate that 95% of audiences would be willing to pay something for performances that have been created specifically to be watched online, with 15% saying that they would pay the same as a live experience, and 52% that they would be willing to pay a lower ticket price than for a live experience.

The Act Two Indigo survey results also suggest that charging for online work makes sense in the long run, with those who have previously paid for digital content more likely to do so again in the future. As Baker Richards note in their analysis of the survey results, setting 'a low anchor price now for digital content could be more costly that offering it for free,' as setting the price too low 'could undermine the value of the offer, making it difficult to increase prices in future' (Baker Richards, 6; see also our meta-analysis of Baker Richards and the Audience Agency's analysis of the Indigo Survey in our Introduction).

Our interviews provide further insight into why audiences would or would not be willing to pay for different kinds of Zoom theatre experience. The following factors emerged as particularly important reasons for why audiences may, or may not, be willing to pay to watch Zoom theatre.

Zoom theatre is a new form with benefits distinct from in-person theatre
Interviewees explained they felt that Zoom theatre represented a distinct form of theatre rather than a direct substitute for in-person live theatre. For these audiences, Zoom theatre offers a number of particular benefits and as a result, they would be willing to continue to pay for Zoom theatre or similar digital experiences even once they are able to return to theatres. Some interviewees articulated this in terms of the form itself and what it was able to do for the storytelling experience:

> *'it feels like a distinct thing, it's not physically being there in a theatre […] it's not that but also it's not the sort of filmed play, so they are all on stage and there's a camera which I struggle with because it's like a movie but not done like a proper movie, […] it feels to me like a distinct thing'*
> *'we've enjoyed it and it's been a substitute to theatre but I think it's more complementary rather than a substitution'*

> *'I think it would depend on the production. I saw another thing […] But that as well was one of those productions where I was like…I don't know how you would do this in the theatre as well as this. They used a lot of things where, a lot of close ups and a lot of tiling of people and a lot of things where they were kind of cutting away to video and I just felt like, oh it's something else […] it seemed to me that there's a possibility for productions that have a version or are entirely best suited for Zoom'*

> *'I think I would [be interested in watching Zoom theatre when theatres reopen]. But that's also because I have an interest in immersive and that transmedia thing, that merging. […] And I think it's a different experience than going out to the theatre but I would still engage with that and I'm quite excited by the opportunity that has presented itself'*

'I like stuff that exploits the media […] The Tempest really exploited the Zoom media and perhaps there is more that can be done with that which was really great'

For these audience members, seeing how creatives are using the medium in innovative ways is part of their enjoyment of the experience, distinguishing it from other online formats such as streaming as well as from in-person theatre.

For others, the benefits of Zoom theatre lay not just in the content and its presentation, but in how the format allowed them to engage with and watch that content. Benefits included the convenience of Zoom theatre, with interviewees mentioning that they would be willing to pay to see more Zoom productions as they would allow them to see theatre that they otherwise would not have had the chance to engage with because of geographical distance, childcare, or cost:

'I guess it's because of the children and child care, obviously we can take them to the theatre and I have been to the theatre a few times but normally I would go with my husband and we have had trips up to Stratford but relying on people looking after the kids'

'I think it's just the opportunity. So where I live is two hours from any major city so we are two hours from Baltimore and two hours from DC so to go to a large scale professional theatre it is a ton of time, a lot of money, a lot of schedule clearing so you just end up for the most part not doing it. My kids are older now so it's not so much an issue but one of my friends has younger kids and she said […] she's seen so much more theatre now than she had in the past three years combined because they don't want to have to get a sitter for their kids to go out even though they are right in the city'

'for things that you think you'd really like to see but can't really travel to London at the moment, or I can't get to the venue if it's up North or something, well actually if I can see it from home it's not quite the same but at least I can see it and I won't miss out on it so I think that's where I, I do think that access and travel will play a huge part and I think for many audiences.'

Others articulated how they would still value Zoom theatre once the pandemic is over for the opportunity it provides to watch theatre and connect with friends, with whom it would not be possible to attend in person even if theatres were open:

'sharing it with other people is I think a real plus, so there's still going to be people I'd want to share it with who aren't in London'

'Yes, particularly if I could do it with friends. I live a fair distance from friends at the moment having moved somewhere for a job where I don't know anyone so all of my friends are kind of 2 plus hours away so I might not go to the theatre here because I've got no one to go with. And I'm happy to take myself to the cinema on my own, I'm not so happy to go to the theatre on my own. So being able to do something like this would be great with other people.'

Importantly, a number of interviewees also highlighted the benefits of Zoom theatre in terms of accessibility:

'we've been talking for ages about the various organisations, oh wouldn't it be nice to bring live theatre to home and suddenly this is a way that you can do it and it will really open it up for people who really can't get to the theatre for whatever reason, because they need to move around or they can't travel, or the dark or the time, or whatever the issue is, I think it's really going to open it up'

> *'I'm thinking about accessibility actually so it could bring a lot of theatre to a lot of people who can't get into the theatre or don't want to, this is a different format that can reach a lot of people and what about casts that are separated by large swaths of land and sea – you could have international casts. I think there's a lot going on here that we could make better and more entertaining and I think it could be running concurrently with theatres as an option.'*

Zoom theatre is thus perceived to be an exciting new performance medium in its own right and to have the additional benefits of opening up performance to viewers at a geographical distance from venues, viewers for whom the logistics of attending in-person theatre are challenging, and audiences for whom Zoom theatre enables barriers to physical access to be removed.

Zoom theatre mitigates risk

A recurrent theme that emerged was that Zoom theatre reduces or mitigates certain types of risk for audiences, influencing their willingness to continue to pay for digital theatre experiences. Most obviously, interviewees mentioned the continued threat of Covid-19 and the risk of attending live theatre, explaining that even if theatres re-opened, they would be still be reluctant to attend:

> *'they've opened things up here and we don't go because I don't think it's safe. There might be things that are open, like our movie theatres are open, they sit people ten feet apart but I still won't do it and so I get anxiety, I don't feel safe. If I don't feel safe, I'm not going to do it. I just think it's too risky right now and, even if there's that availability I may not want to do it'*

> *'I suppose the other thing is, what does after lockdown mean. At this point how far are we away from sitting in a theatre with every seat being full so I think that's a greyscale. When it's not a scary thing to walk into a packed theatre, that seems a long way away'*

> *At the moment, thinking pragmatically, I do not feel safe in a theatre and I don't think it's wise to go into a theatre'*

> *'it's hard to imagine looking forward to a time where going to the theatre seems like an appealing prospect again because I would always think of it as a place where you are very close to other people for a long time'*

> *'I'm still really cautious at going out, I have been out and I have been going to work, I do my Tesco shop once a week, but the theatres, although I really want to go back to them I suppose for me it's the unknown at the moment and obviously being so close to someone in the theatre, I would want to give it time. So if a theatre show was live and was Zoomed as well, it would give me the confidence to eventually go back to those theatres.'*

These comments reflect the findings in Indigo's Act Two report, which finds that while two thirds of audiences would be happy to return to theatre's with social distancing measures in place, some audiences remain cautious. Our respondents' comments show how the very real and serious risk of Covid-19 is influencing how audiences approach theatre experiences.

The comments also illustrate how decisions regarding risk are complex and based on individual circumstances. One interviewee explained at length her thought process around attending in person:

'I think I would perhaps be happy to go on my own wearing a mask but would I take my children, probably not because again even if you say don't touch this, [...] I would still be very conscious and I wouldn't feel relaxed to go and watch a performance because I would be constantly thinking, don't move don't do this don't do that, I want to go to the theatre and enjoy it I don't want to be thinking about the risks, I think that would be in my mind all the time. And again, we often use public transport, so to get to the theatre in Oxford we step on a bus or a train, and again that affects me as well, getting to the theatre. So it's not just about getting in the theatre, it's about getting to the theatre. Again, we could drive but we've got to think about that, it's not always easy to drive into Oxford and park unless it's the evening. So yeah, it's a lot of factors really. I don't think it's affected us yet but in years to come if theatres aren't there, we will be missing them'

For this audience member the risk of exposing her children to Covid-19, both in the theatre and on the way to the theatre, for an experience she worries that she wouldn't be able to enjoy because of that potential risk, is balanced against the risk of losing out on an experience that is an important part of her family life. With further changes to restrictions and increasing infection rates, it may be that the willingness of audiences to return to in-person theatre will fluctuate. As Baker Richards notes in their analysis of Act Two, those who have the most concerns about returning to live performance are more likely to be willing to pay for digital, with Zoom theatre potentially offering a parallel or alternative experience for those who prefer not to, or who cannot, attend live theatre.

Aside from the risk of Covid-19, interviewees also described being willing to pay for Zoom theatre because it lowered the perceived risks of participating in new, or unfamiliar, kinds of experience. One interviewee noted that they had been able to watch types of theatre online that they would otherwise not have booked to see, and another explained that she would watch Zoom theatre even when theatres were reopened because

'you can take a risk on something because at the price point you can actually explore more. And then honestly if you paid £20 and you're twenty minutes into it and you're really not enjoying it, you just log off. I probably wouldn't because I'd feel bad but you could without disrupting anything. Whereas if you're actually at a live show if you get up and walk out it is pretty bad, that's just so rude, but it doesn't seem as rude if you're doing it on Zoom.'

For these audiences, Zoom and other online theatre lowers the barrier for entry, meaning that they are able to take risks on content and different artforms.

A number of interviewees also mentioned that Zoom theatre offered them an alternative, low-stakes way of participating in interactive theatre. Where they might be cautious or too nervous to fully participate in person, they described how being physically distant and behind a screen was in some ways liberating:

'the sort of safe controllable level of interactivity is different like I would probably be very unlikely to put my hand up in a theatre to say yes I want to do this bit of interaction and certainly those sorts of production, I can't remember what they're called but that immersive thing were as soon as you walk through the door you're almost forced to become part of the production, I would find that quite nerve wracking. So I think being able to interact but on your own terms I think feels like, it's a good fit for me'

'part of the reason I didn't watch the original Tempest was I was kind of nervous about the amount of audience participation, I can appreciate in some ways actors want to surprise people but I think, in some ways saying like there will be some audience participation but you don't have to have to have your camera on all the time, some reassurance of what is expected from the audience, but then I also

find like promenade theatre quite nerve wracking so that might just be me being shy.'

It is important to note therefore, that these audiences don't necessarily see the Zoom experience as being secondary or less-than the live in-person, immersive experience. Indeed, for these audience members, the digital experience offers them the opportunity to participate in a way that they are more comfortable with (for more on audience participation see Part 6).

It is clear, then, that different types of risk factor into audiences' willingness to pay for Zoom theatre. Audiences are still reluctant to return to theatres in-person because of the risk of Covid-19, which consequently has an impact on how willing they are to pay for online theatre experiences. As well as mitigating the risk of Covid-19, Zoom theatre also presents audiences with a low-risk way of participating in forms of theatre that they may have previously been reluctant to engage with, either because of financial cost or because of nervousness around participatory theatre.

Willingness to watch live vs. pre-recorded

Respondents expressed less willingness to pay for pre-recorded Zoom experiences than for live ones, with liveness and the ability to participate a key factor in what respondents enjoyed about the experience. However, the interviews indicated that some audiences might be willing to pay for pre-recorded experiences depending on the company and the specific piece. For example, one interviewee said that she would value live experiences more highly than pre-recorded ones but explained that

> *'it would depend on the Zoom production, I would feel a little sad and left out if it was a live thing that was recorded and I saw it after the fact. But as long as it was thoughtfully done, and really the focus on storytelling and using the medium well, I'd be happy to see it pre-recorded.'*

Another interviewee who had watched the pre-recorded research performance also said she wouldn't rule out paying for a future pre-recorded performance:

> *'I wouldn't pay to watch something being streamed on Zoom but if they'd just put it up on YouTube and you were watching it as a regular video rather than having it streamed through Zoom, if it was something from Creation or something, I would be willing to pay for that, just watching it as a video.'*

Similarly, another interviewee explained that her preference would be for quality and innovation, regardless of whether the content was streamed live, pre-recorded, or even in-person:

> *'Primarily it would always depend on the company. So for example, Complicite's Encounter I would totally watch that because it's a seminal piece and it's an amazing aural experience, so I would pay to watch that recorded, I did pay to watch it recorded. Obviously it would be better to see it live but in the instances where I can't and it's a must-see I would definitely do that. Something like The Tempest I would probably prefer….I don't know actually…I think it entirely depends on the production actually. I'm not biased towards one or the other I think, it's always my criteria for any culture, if it's good, I will watch it. I would far rather watch a very well-curated Zoom piece than a crap real-life one, or I would rather watch a very well created recorded piece over a really crappy live piece, it just matters how well it is implemented.'*

Whilst the majority of interviewees and questionnaire respondents indicated a preference for live experiences, then, they also suggested that there was nuance within this preference and that in some

circumstances, they would be happy to pay for pre-recorded content, especially when they have a pre-existing idea about the theatre company or the quality of the production. These findings about quality reflect The Audience Agency's analysis of Indigo's Act Two survey results, which suggests that a lack of quality puts potential audiences, especially younger audiences, off online experiences.

As one interviewee also highlighted, pre-recorded experiences have benefits in terms of convenience, something which may become more relevant as lockdown restrictions lift and schedules begin to fill:
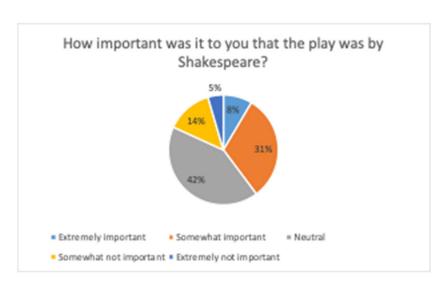
> 'I think my preference would be for live but my schedule doesn't always allow for that so knowing that there's perhaps a live aesthetic to it and then I can watch it afterward. Also, being a teacher, I would love to have some of the recordings of these shows to show my students so having access to that would be amazing.'

Generally, however, audiences attributed great value to live experiences, and would be more willing to pay for live online experiences than for pre-recorded content.

Shakespeare and Willingness to Watch Other Kinds of Content

Respondents also mentioned content as a factor in their willingness to pay, with one writing 'if I were a fan of a particular play, I would watch a recorded zoom show, but probably unlikely to watch something new' and another that 'the Shakespeare thing is a huge pull for me personally'.

Although 'I wanted to watch some Shakespeare' was the least commonly selected reason for wanting to watch the production, 31% of respondents said that it was somewhat important to them that the play was by Shakespeare, and 8% that it was extremely important. The majority of respondents (42%) answered neutrally to this question, with 14% saying it was somewhat unimportant, and 5% saying it was extremely unimportant to them that the play was by Shakespeare.
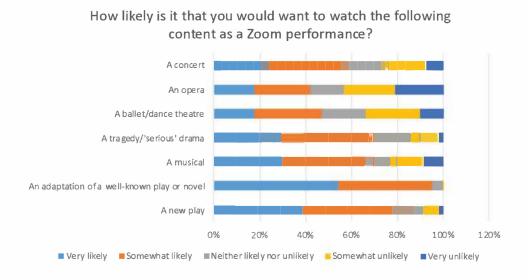
We also asked audiences how likely they would be to watch different kinds of content as a Zoom performance. The content respondents said they would be most likely to want to watch was 'an adaptation of a well-known play or novel (54% very likely, 41% somewhat likely, 5% neither likely nor unlikely), suggesting that familiarity with a work may be an important factor in audiences wanting to engage with Zoom theatre, and that that desire for familiarity might also explain why Shakespeare is valued by 31% of the surveyed audience. However, respondents also expressed an interest in watching new plays via Zoom (38% very likely, 41% somewhat likely, 11% neither likely nor unlikely, 7% somewhat unlikely and 2% very unlikely), indicating that audiences may see Zoom as low-risk way to engage with

new theatrical material.

Respondents were also more likely than unlikely to want to watch a tragedy or 'serious' drama, a musical and a concert via Zoom. They were more ambivalent about wanting to watch a ballet or dance performance with respondents almost evenly split on whether they were likely or unlikely to want to watch this type of content, and 19% answering neutrally. Respondents were also split on watching opera via Zoom with 21% saying they would be very unlikely, and 22% somewhat unlikely to want to watch an opera as a Zoom performance.

How likely is it that you would want to watch the following content as a Zoom performance?

Although audiences were mixed on whether the play being by Shakespeare was important, these results again highlight the need to balance familiarity with new content or innovation in online experiences. On one hand, audiences are attracted by familiar content, and on the other, they may see Zoom as a way of trying out new material and types of cultural content.

Summary: Value for Money and Willingness to Pay

Overall, respondents felt that The Tempest represented good value for money and indicated a willingness to continue to engage with, and pay for, Zoom theatre experiences, even when theatres reopen. This accords with the findings of Act Two on audiences' willingness to pay for online experiences. Creation Theatre's audiences placed extra value on the fact that the production was created specifically to be watched online, that it was live, and that they were able to participate actively. Additionally, the interviews demonstrated that:

- Audiences who initially thought the experience was expensive often changed their mind once they had experienced the show, suggesting that prior experience and knowledge of quality are important in willingness to pay.
- Audiences were not necessarily aware of the costs involved in producing online work, which influenced their perception of value. Greater transparency around this, or communicating this to audiences, may increase willingness to pay.
- There was a large amount of variation in terms of what audiences deemed affordable or good value, which was often based on what audiences were used to paying (with even greater variation between international/US audiences and UK audiences). While the majority of audiences felt that the fixed

price-per-device strategy represented good value, introducing tiered offerings or concessionary prices may increase willingness to pay for a wider audience.[54]

- The risk of Covid-19 continues to influence the decisions audience make regarding theatre attendance, which in turn impacts on their willingness to pay. This willingness is therefore likely to fluctuate in relation to infection rates and the availability and safety of live attendance, highlighting a need to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances.
- Many audience members see Zoom theatre as a new and different experience which represents benefits that are distinct from live theatre, and they would be willing to pay for similar experiences, even in a post-pandemic landscape.

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54 Baker Richards note that 'any digital pricing strategy should reflect the same value proposition as your live pricing strategy, including the means to achieve price differentiation so that those people willing to pay more are given the opportunity to and those who simply cannot afford to pay as much are not left out' (https://www.baker-richards.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/After-the-Interval-Act-II-Analysis.pdf, p. 6).
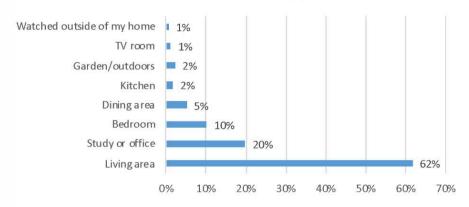
Digital Theatre Transformation, Part 6: The Audience: Behaviour, Experience and Impact

This part of the report looks at how audiences watched the Zoom Tempest, as well as how they responded to the production and what the most important aspects of their experiences were. It also examines the key impacts that participating had on audiences, including maintaining mental wellbeing, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness, and inspiring hope.
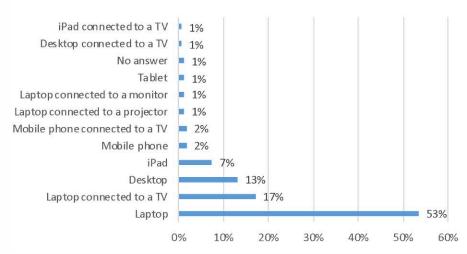
Audience Behaviour: How audiences watched

Where audiences watched and what devices they used

Where in your home did you watch the performance? If you moved around, please select all that apply.

- Watched outside of my home — 1%
- TV room — 1%
- Garden/outdoors — 2%
- Kitchen — 2%
- Dining area — 5%
- Bedroom — 10%
- Study or office — 20%
- Living area — 62%

What device did you watch the performance on?

- iPad connected to a TV — 1%
- Desktop connected to a TV — 1%
- No answer — 1%
- Tablet — 1%
- Laptop connected to a monitor — 1%
- Laptop connected to a projector — 1%
- Mobile phone connected to a TV — 2%
- Mobile phone — 2%
- iPad — 7%
- Desktop — 13%
- Laptop connected to a TV — 17%
- Laptop — 53%
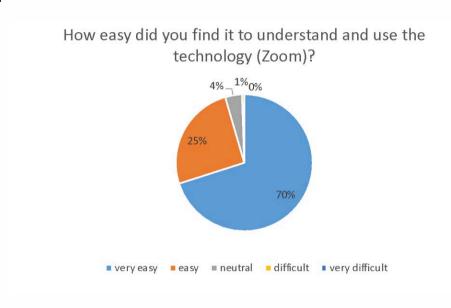
The vast majority of respondents said that they watched in a living area or a study/office, although audiences did report watching from other areas of their homes, including outside in a garden. Most respondents watched the production via a laptop. 23% of respondents said they watched on a larger screen by connecting a laptop, mobile phone or tablet to a television or projector. Fewer respondents watched on a desktop computer or a tablet (8%).

One interviewee said that she had watched the production via her phone because the volume on her laptop wasn't working, suggesting that, although rare, not having functioning hardware can be an issue for audience members.

Although The Tempest was produced early in lockdown at a time when household mixing was not allowed, one interviewee also described having an alternative set up for the later Zoom production of Alice, for which they invited friends over and watched via two different laptops in the same room, indicating the different configurations that may become possible depending on restrictions on gathering in groups.

Using Zoom

How easy did you find it to understand and use the technology (Zoom)?

very easy · easy · neutral · difficult · very difficult

Respondents to our survey said that they found it very easy or easy to use Zoom technology during the performance. Just one respondent said they had found it difficult.

When asked if Creation could have provided any further guidance to help with using the technology, some respondents commented that watching the production was amongst their first experiences of Zoom:

'the company did a great job of working the technical instructions into the world of the show'

'I found the advice and guidance very straightforward and reassuring'

'I was unfamiliar with Zoom at the time so wasn't sure how to turn off the camera'

'I'd never used Zoom before and was nervous to get it right, but it was easier than I expected'
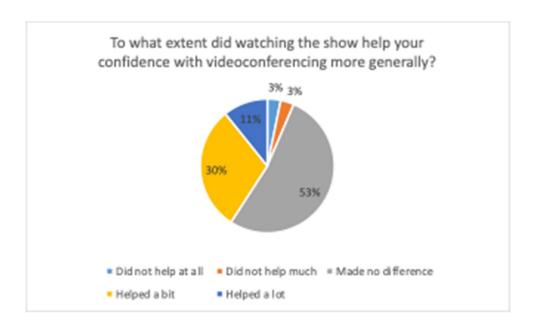
A number of respondents noted that they had become more adept at using Zoom during lockdown. One respondent who was already familiar with the platform noted the importance of not assuming that everyone has the same level of familiarity:

'I didn't find it too difficult, but that might be because I was already familiar with Zoom through work. For people who aren't, I think it's really important to go through everything they need to do really slowly and methodically (particularly where on the screen the thing you need to click will appear). Zoom can be quite an intimidating platform for new users because it has so many menus and things popping up in different parts of the screen. It's easy to forget that once you become familiar with it.'

Around half of respondents said that watching the show made no difference to their confidence with

videoconferencing more generally, but 30% of respondents said that watching the show helped a bit, and 11% said it helped a lot, with their confidence using videoconferencing technology.

Interviews provided more insight into audiences experiences of using Zoom. Many mentioned that although they had not heard of Zoom before lockdown, that they had been using it regularly during the pandemic:

> 'it's a bit of an exaggeration to say I'm doing a Zoom meeting once a day, but in the last two to three months I've probably been on 20 or 30 Zoom meetings and seminars, webinars and various things and each presenter has brought in another aspect of Zoom'

Although this audience member was using Zoom to find storytelling experiences and to connect with other people, other interviewees noted that they were using Zoom constantly at work, and were experiencing screen and Zoom fatigue. While this was a turn-off for some, interestingly one interviewee noted that he enjoyed using Zoom, a tool that he has begun to associate with work calls, in a new and engaging way. He enjoyed

> 'the idea of Zoom being something that is kind of fun and engaging […]. I have to use it for work […] so that was the other exciting thing, like "wow Zoom can actually be fun!"'

The creative capacity of Zoom was also of interest to those who were watching for professional reasons, who said that the way in which the company were using Zoom, and how they were doing it, was of particular interest to them.

While audiences found Zoom easy to use, interviewees also expressed certain anxieties involved in watching a performance over the platform. For one interviewee, waiting to receive the link to the Zoom performance was a source of anxiety:

> 'I actually phoned up and probably ¾ hour before saying I haven't got the Zoom link, and it was only then that one was told it was 20 minutes before.'

This interviewee went on to say that he thought Creation had solved this issue for subsequent performances, stating when to expect the Zoom link in their confirmation emails. He also explained that he appreciated the inclusion of a pre-show before the show started in Alice, saying that in The Tempest, 'there wasn't any guidance as to how long it was going to be before the start was or anything else to engage you for that ten minutes'. As well as uncertainty around when you should be receiving links or if the show has started or not, interviewees also described experiencing some anxiety around internet connection. One interviewee described this as 'second-hand anxiety' explaining that:

'I have a significant degree of empathy for the idea of trying to perform for people and at any point those people might just stop being able to see what I'm doing. Certainly the one in April there were a couple of moments when something went a bit wrong and they were able to work around it and they were able to switch to a different character and it worked. But there was definitely a part of me that was feeling the tension'

This wasn't necessarily a negative aspect of the experience for this interviewee, and he described it as being 'a bit of the excitement of "this is really live"'. However, he noted that there were limits to this, stating that 'there's no fun in Zoom freezing'.

Although (as discussed in detail below) audiences described technological glitches in the performance as something they were either happy to overlook or as something they actively enjoyed, there were limits to this. This was particularly true of the experience of interviewees who watched the pre-recorded research performance, during which there were significant playback issues. Although both of these interviewees persevered to the end of the performance, they noted that the experience was not a particularly enjoyable one, with a lag between visual and audio making it very difficult to follow. As one explained:

'as it was constantly slightly laggy and jerky it gave the experience a stop motion animation [feel], it was a not total pleasant sensory experience watching it, it was quite jarring on the eyes'

However, audiences who watched live expressed that they expected, and were willing to deal with, some minor technical issues, and appreciated when the company were able to work around technical problems.

Generally, audiences were very familiar with Zoom and found it easy to use, making it a fairly accessible platform for performance. Despite increasing levels of competence with Zoom, familiarity cannot be assumed, and having an alternative way of contacting the company (e.g. over the phone) in case of technical difficulties is essential. Even when audiences are familiar with the technology, the process of receiving links and joining the performance can provoke some anxiety; it is therefore also important to communicate with audiences in advance to let them know what to expect.

Audience behaviour before, during and after the performance

When asked what they did, if anything, to prepare for the performance, the most common answer was preparing snacks and/or a drink (59%), with 56% also saying that they organised their viewing area. Half of respondents said that they had to organise their schedule around the performance, suggesting that they approached the performance as an event in a way that was similar to attending an in-person performance. Audiences also engaged socially before the performance, discussing the play with the people they were watching with in-person, as well as organising video calls with friends who were watching elsewhere.

While some audience members approached the performance as a special event, others took advantage of
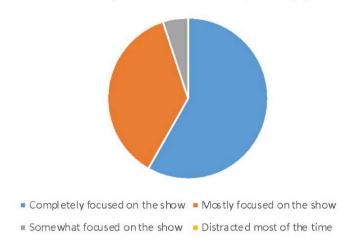
the medium to adopt a more relaxed approach to theatregoing. As they were at home, audiences were able to engage in viewing practices that are usually unavailable in the theatre or during a live performance. 72% said they ate and drank during the production, with 23% moving around in the duration of the show. Respondents also reported talking during the show, with 13% also messaging someone who was watching in a different location, 6% looking on social media, and 2% posting on social media. Some of these practices helped respondents feel more connected to a theatrical community, with one audience member saying that being able to switch to 'gallery view' to see the audience whilst watching had been important:

'Part of the delight of watching in this way is the glimpse into other narratives and lives other than those officially being performed; I wanted to know what or who was in my community audience for the evening'

Despite engaging in all of these activities, the majority of respondents said that they felt that they were completely focused on the show whilst watching (58%), with a further 37% saying that they felt they were mostly focused.

Whilst watching the show would you say you were:

- Completely focused on the show
- Mostly focused on the show
- Somewhat focused on the show
- Distracted most of the time

When asked what had distracted them, technological issues were the most commonly mentioned source of distraction, with respondents reporting that 'broadband glitches', poor 'sound quality', and watching on a small screen made it difficult to maintain focus on the production. For others, not being familiar with Zoom was a distracting factor:

'When I watched in April it was one of the first times I had ever used Zoom – I spent lots of time scrolling through the audience video windows, figuring out how the platform worked […] when I watched in July, I was less distracted – I knew how Zoom worked by then'

'Before the show, we were sent instructions for setting up our mic, view and screen settings but the Zoom meeting room was not opened until about 5 minutes after the start time and the performance started immediately, with no introduction. As a result, I spent the first few minutes finding the settings and trying to change them (in fact, the mic and view was already set up) and missed the crucial set-up of the story where the characters are introduced!'

'I was unfortunately late to the start and also am new to Zoom. I felt a bit embarrassed and worried I might accidentally impact the live performance as I scrambled to realize the capabilities for interaction. Once I felt acclimated we were already 20 minutes into the show.'

The other reasons given for feeling distracted were mostly related to watching in a home environment. Family members, children, pets and neighbours were all mentioned as actively distracting factors, while

others mentioned that they felt distracted simply by being in a home environment with the compulsion to complete household tasks as they watched. Phone calls, messages and notifications were also commonly mentioned as vying for audience attention, with some respondents reporting that they were 'second-screening', or browsing their phone while they watched the production.

One interviewee explained that she was conflicted about using her phone during the performance. Although she was using her phone to take notes, she felt uncomfortable knowing that the actors and other audience members could potentially see her on her phone and think that she was not paying attention, which led her to stop using it:

> 'I thought no, I'm at the theatre I'm not going to look at my phone and it was a very interesting concept […] you are watching a performance, but at the same time you are at your home […] I guess normally if you watch TV or a film you are looking at your phone at the same time but there were certain points in the piece where you were expected to be fully engaged and to do something, so I can't have a phone as a distraction'

Her comment illustrates the uncertainty that some audiences experienced about the 'right' way to engage when watching theatre in the home. The comment above demonstrates the tension between how audiences are used to watching theatre (focused, not using a phone) and how they might be used to watching TV or film at home (not necessarily as focused, using a phone). This audience member ultimately decided to approach the production as if she were at the theatre. As she explains, this decision was based partly on the liveness of the production and its audience participation elements: knowing that she might be called on to participate, and that she was visible to others, focused this audience member's attention. Other interviewees also echoed the idea that having to participate actively, and being visible in doing so, was an effective way of holding their attention:

> 'the [online shows] that don't hold my attention are where I know that nothing is going to happen, I can get my cell phone out and look and no one is going to know […] knowing that something will be coming […] just helps feel more engaged'

> 'I find it very difficult to focus on things that are just watch[ing], because I second-screen and I get distracted, but I have done a lot of [performances] where they've asked to engage with social media or have asked you to do something on screen […] that's my preference'

Whether due to perceived etiquette or the engagement of audience members through invitations to participate and liveness, then, many audience members reported resisting the distraction of their phones, opting to approach the production as they would a piece of live theatre. The exception to this was where audience members were using phones to communicate with others who were watching the production elsewhere. Indeed, Creation have encouraged audience members to communicate with each other via messaging platforms such as WhatsApp in later productions. One interviewee explained that he and his friend had 'texted a little bit' during the performance, but that this was contained to reactions rather than sustained discussion:

> 'I sort of popped up on screen and there was a thing where you can ask a question of the characters and I did one of those and then she texted like, OMG or something of that nature. But we weren't sort of discussing like, "do you think this is good" or whatever. We then had a Zoom call afterwards where we talked about it'

This was a common sentiment, with 34% of questionnaire respondents reporting that they had discussed the show after the performance with friends who had watched in different locations. Respondents also described engaging socially after the performance in other ways, with 25% saying they posted on social media, 51% discussing the show with the people they had watched with at home, and 64% saying that they had discussed the show with people who had not seen it.

The questionnaire results also suggest that the production was successful in encouraging audiences to engage further with online theatre, with 29% saying that they went on to book another Creation Zoom show after the performance, 25% that they looked for more online experiences and 12% that they followed the company on social media.

Summary: Audience Behaviour
- Audiences mostly watched in living areas, and mostly watched on laptops.
- Audience found it easy to use Zoom, but communicating instructions clearly to audiences was still important.
- Audiences approached their participation in multiple ways, with some replicating an approach similar to in-person theatre, and others taking advantage of the opportunity to watch in a more relaxed way.
- Despite moving around and talking etc., audiences said they were focused on the show, with audience participation increasing engagement and focus.
- Being able to discuss the experience with others was important for audiences, with audiences especially interacting socially before and after the performance.

Audience Experience: What did audiences say about the production?
General response to the production
71% of respondents strongly agreed and 25% agreed that they had enjoyed the experience of watching the show. When asked to explain their favourite moment or aspect of the production, the opportunity to participate was mentioned most frequently by questionnaire respondents, with the ingenuity and innovation of the production, the ability to see other audience members, and the actors' performances also commonly mentioned.
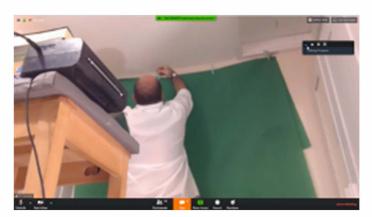
Respondents also frequently mentioned the ending of the performance, where the actors removed their green screens and make-up before the curtain call, and the appearance of a live snake as their favourite moments of the production.
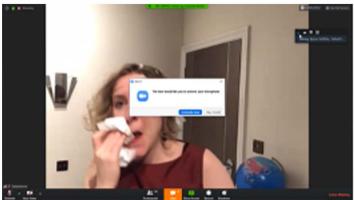
Antonio (Al Barclay) and Gonzalo (Hex the snake) talking to the audience

Giles Stoakley removing his green screen

Madeleine McMahon removing her make-up as the invitation to the audience to unmute their microphones so the applause can be heard has appeared on the screen

Respondents were also positive when asked what they thought about the look or style of the production. Many noted the 'rough and ready' or 'DIY' aesthetic of the production, but explained that this did not detract from their enjoyment of the show. Indeed, it was common for respondents to say that the style of the production, including the small glitches, actively added to their enjoyment of the experience. Some explained that the look of the production added to the interpretation of the play:

> 'The glitches, as such, were part and parcel of watching a new way of viewing theatre. The storyline lent itself to little hiccups as the action moves from one disparate place to another'

> 'It was an excellent and polished performance. Even when there were "technical glitches" these were dealt with in a highly original and creative way'

Others described the look and feel of the production as directly contributing to a sense of authenticity, 'realness', or liveness:

> 'There were certainly some glitches […] But that made the "live" experience all the more immediate'

> 'I thought it was brilliant; the "look" made it a more intimate experience with the audience participation; more polishing may have reduced this'

> 'Glitches were few and did not detract – rather they added to the live feel and immediacy of the production'

> 'I think a less "polished" look fits in well with the digital aspect and chopping and changing between characters and locations — it feels more rustic and authentic. Also I think it made technical glitches seem less problematic'

> 'I enjoyed the blend of chaos and talent, and I think the glitches bring a much needed air of reality'

> 'I really enjoyed the look of the play, because while it was very professional it also still looked kind of homemade, which made me feel more connected overall to the production. I think that the less polished look was helpful to make the audience feel like a real part of the performance'

For these audience members, then, the production's aesthetic was an intrinsic part of the experience, contributing to a sense of liveness and connection. Approaching the production slightly differently, others felt that the creativity, and the way that the company overcame the limitations of the medium, balanced

out any misgivings they might have had about the style of the production or any glitches:

> *'I enjoyed seeing the thought and creativity that had gone into creating some very effective moments. This more than compensated for the odd glitch'*

> *'I loved the clunky aspects of the production. It made me really think about what might be necessary to produce it with actors in different locations'*

> *'It didn't bother me that it wasn't a polished look. I didn't expect a polished look anyway due to the restricted circumstances in which it was filmed. It all seemed to hang together'*

The context of early lockdown clearly played into how audiences responded to the look of the production. Respondents were not expecting perfection, were happy to compromise on visual quality for a live experience, and were impressed with the novelty, creativity and ingenuity of production. They acknowledged how lockdown shaped their responses to the production, noting that they would likely expect to see more polish in future Zoom productions, especially if they were produced outside of a lockdown context:

> *'I was understanding of technical glitches and liked that it had a can-do, "let's put on a show in a time of adversity" feel — I would probably expect more polish as time goes on and we all get more used to the new way of living'*

> *'It was so bold to get this production on Zoom and I was blown away by the audacity and creativity that made it happen. I think, however, in future terms, a more polished look should be aimed for because the glitches were part of the charm to begin with but that charm could wear off'*

> *'I really liked how it was set. I think it was easy to ignore the glitches but if this was a long-term format, would expect it to be more polished'*

In their Bounce Forwards analysis of the Indigo After the Interval: Act 2 data, Audience Agency note how perceived lack of quality is a significant factor in putting potential audiences off from engaging with digital cultural experiences. These comments support the idea that while audiences were happy to compromise on quality at the start of lockdown, this willingness may decrease with time, with audiences looking for more polish from future online experiences.

However, the comments from audiences of The Tempest also demonstrate that audiences are not necessarily looking for perfect, slick finishes, especially when any glitches or limitations of the medium are creatively embraced and incorporated into a production. In the case of The Tempest, the 'homemade' aesthetic allowed audiences to connect with the actors in new ways. One interviewee explained:

> *'I liked the fact that it was makeshift, which made you feel that you were part of it in that sense, there wasn't that formal divide between the actors and the audience […] it was almost like, anybody could do that […] there was a feeling of togetherness with the audience […] rather than them always being over there and being anonymous actors, it brought them almost into our space'*

Another interviewee described how the aesthetic evoked a sense of nostalgia, reminding her of childhood TV shows as well as 'the strange off-beat internet, not the slick corporate kind of internet that we have now'. Having a 'lo-fi' aesthetic can therefore create new artistic opportunities, and can foster new ways of
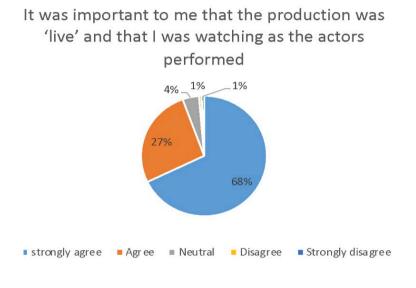
connecting and build relationships with audiences.

While a DIY aesthetic helped with a sense of connection, it is important to note that problems with audio were more likely to have a distancing effect. Sound quality was a frustration, especially for those watching the pre-recorded performance, during which they experienced significant lags with sound, which interviewees said made the production difficult to follow.

The general response to the production was very positive, with audiences enjoying the look and style of the production. While this response was influenced by the context of early lockdown, the questionnaire and interview responses also suggest that responses to the production were dependent on audience attitudes to liveness, audience participation, and how far they felt part of a community.

Liveness, audience participation, and community
Watching Live
Our survey responses suggest that watching live as the actors performed was important to audiences, with 68% strongly agreeing and 27% agreeing that this was an important part of their experience. Overall, therefore, an overwhelming 95% of our survey respondents considered the show's liveness and the simultaneity of performance and reception to be important

It was important to me that the production was 'live' and that I was watching as the actors performed

- strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Although the pre-recorded research performance had technical issues, the experiences of those who watched provides some insight into the importance of liveness in Zoom performances. One interviewee who watched the pre-recorded version explained that she:

> 'definitely realised how vital it was to be live especially for what Creation Theatre was going for, they wanted that interaction and I felt kind of left out because it was pre-recorded and they wanted to solicit my participation […] after that viewing I thought to myself I should have done a live thing because that would probably be the superior experience'

While she could watch the recorded audience enjoying themselves, she said that she missed the 'visceral experience' of participating in the production. Another interviewee who watched the pre-recorded production noted that she felt her reaction to the performance style was also impacted by the fact she was not watching live. Outside of the moment of the production, she explained that she found the style quite loud and exuberant, saying that 'if you're not feeling caught up in it you can start feeling more and more distant'.

Those who did watch live also pinpointed audience participation as a reason why the show felt so live, and why watching live was so important to the experience of the show. One interviewee explained that the fact that the show relied on the participation of the audience made the show feel particularly live:

> *'I like it when there's a sense that it could not be without the audience. [This] was the first one I'd seen where there was a direct acknowledgement that there was an audience watching. And for me that was what made it good […] that was the first piece where I felt like I was almost in the theatre'*

Another interviewee explained that 'obviously having the audience interaction makes it feel live' but went on to explain that her sense of liveness was not dependent only on audience participation:

> *'Just knowing that it is [live] makes a difference even if there hadn't been the audience interaction. So it's the knowledge that lots of people are watching something new to them at the time that you are watching in and of itself. But the audience interaction underlines that to you, of course. I think it's the sense of connection with people that isn't there if you are watching something asynchronously in your own time without other people being involved'*

This comment illustrates how watching live can create a sense of community and connection between audience members, which, as explored below, is something that was particularly valued about this experience by audiences. One interviewee suggested that whilst her preferred mode of digital performance would be 'live with the actors performing live and a live audience', watching synchronously alongside other audience members was at least as important as watching live while the actors performed, saying that her second-preferred option would be 'pre-filmed with a live audience'.

Other interviewees, however, located the value of liveness in the liveness of the performance itself. A number of interviewees mentioned that they felt watching live was exciting because of the potential for error, whether human or technological:

> *'I think there is something unique about it being a live show that gives it that edge that you get when you are actually seeing it when the people are there in the room with you. I think that what makes live theatre exciting is that the human factor and the jeopardy and all the rest of it'*

> *'I guess it's almost the unpredictability of Zoom and broadband that it gave it a kind of edginess. When you're watching something off the telly or Netflix you can just pause it and come back to it when the broadband is better so that contributed to that perception of liveness'*

> *'there is definitely a different feeling when you are watching something that is being performed live versus a recording […] you were like "is it going to work for them…are they going to have a technical issue" so you're in it with them hoping and willing it to be a success and for everything to work out for them […] if you're seeing a recording all of that is wiped away so you are much more distant from the actual performance'*
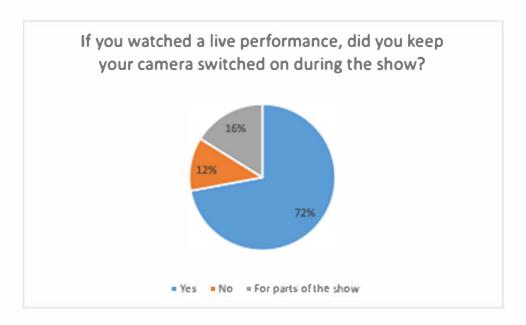
As these responses show, therefore, watching live was important to audiences of The Tempest for a number of different reasons. For some, the liveness of the performance was key, enabling audience participation and creating a sense of uncertainty around the performance and its distribution that increased anticipation and excitement. For others, watching live was important because it created a shared experience with other audiences members, increasing the sense of connection and community.

Audience Participation

Audience participation was central to respondents' enjoyment of the production, and was the most commonly mentioned element when respondents were asked about their favourite moments of the show.

Audiences were encouraged to keep their camera on during the show but were made aware that the performance was being recorded and that they could opt out of this by keeping their camera off. The majority of respondents (72%) said that they chose to keep their camera on during the show, with a further 16% saying they had kept their camera on for parts of the show.

If you watched a live performance, did you keep your camera switched on during the show?

16%
12%
72%

• Yes   • No   • For parts of the show

Interviewees provided further insight into attitudes towards the audience participation elements of the production. The majority of interviewees said that they were comfortable with participating, and found it a particularly fun part of their experiences:

> 'It adds a real element of fun, you can't be self-conscious about it […] why pay for an interactive production if you're not going to join in and be prepared to look a bit silly, you might look a bit silly, so what!'

> 'I thought [the audience participation] was absolutely brilliant, and completely unexpected. My friend who had seen the first series told me it was brilliant but she goes to theatre a lot, and she said the kids loved it but I thought mine, no way. But actually it really was fun'

Others said that while they ultimately enjoyed participating, they had felt some anxiety about the level of participation that would be required in anticipation of the performance:

> 'I was kind of nervous about the amount of audience participation, I can appreciate in some ways actors want to surprise people but I think saying there will be some audience participation but you don't have to have to have your camera on all the time, some reassurance of what is expected from the audience'

Reflecting the comment above, another interviewee described the importance of communicating with the audience and ensuring that they know they have agency over their camera:

> *'I have this kind of sort of love/hate relationship with the way you are quite exposed. You always have that option to camera off — I think how the audience are given permission to use that is important, you can mention something in passing or you can make it very clear that people have that freedom'*

For others, knowing more about the level and type of participation in advance was less about privacy and more about maximising their ability to participate and enhancing their engagement with the production. At a number of points in the show, audiences were asked to show particular items on screen. Some interviewees expressed a desire to know in advance what some of these things might be, so as to give them the chance to hunt out their best items in preparation for the show:

> *'It's fun, spontaneity is great but I was thinking you could ask folks to have two or three things ready so they have a chance during the day to hunt out because it then gives people a chance to find something that is really wacky rather than reaching for a book on the shelf that's nearby to you, so you can have a few things ready to all join in in a fun way.'*

Some interviewees also described being initially slightly confused or self-conscious about participation in the early stages of the production, but noted that being able to see other audience members also participating was vital in putting them at ease:

> *'there was some confusion at the beginning, we weren't quite clear what we should do or whether we should speak but actually as we got through the play we realised everybody was clapping, we weren't going to be the only ones clapping or making a noise'*

Privacy was not a frequent or major concern for respondents. When it was mentioned by interviewees it tended to be to note that because they had become so used to using Zoom recently, having their camera on was not as much of an issue for them now as it might have been six or so months ago. Others noted that having their cameras on had specific benefits that outweighed any concerns they may have had about privacy:

> *'It wouldn't have been the same experience [having the camera off] because occasionally you come up as the people everyone can see and I think for my daughter that was quite fun. So you obviously are giving away something in terms of your privacy but not really very much I think. It's not a tour of your house or anything like that, it's just sitting on a sofa'*

The balance between the benefits and potential downsides of having your camera on was also articulated by another interviewee who said that she had begun to keep her camera off during Zoom performances because of Zoom fatigue. However, she explained that she felt less connected with her camera off and so she made an active decision to choose when to have her camera on and when to keep it off depending on the production.

The interviews also highlighted that attitudes towards audience participation tended to be dependent on whether audiences were watching alone or in a group, as well as where they were watching. Those watching alone said that they felt somewhat self-conscious and aware of the slightly strange noises that they were making:

> *'because it's an apartment, at the start I was thinking "oh my god my neighbours know I'm here by myself". We were in proper lockdown then, there's no one coming in, and they can hear me blowing or barking like a dog and clapping. So yes, a little bit self-conscious but I think you forget about that*

after a while'

'I was completely comfortable with [the level of audience participation] but I didn't always do it as fully as the people who were watching in groups. It definitely would be something that I'd be more comfortable doing fully if there were someone physically with me in the room'

Those watching in groups said that joining in together made them feel more comfortable:

'with my daughter we could make the bird noises and the clapping together […] It was good that we had each other to support and that we could just be natural and relaxed with each other and just have a bit of fun'

'at the beginning you are a bit conscious and as a parent you do it more than your children because you want to show them but you feel very self-conscious and then actually it is so funny that you end up running about finding something to eat so yes it was great'

The second comment demonstrates how group dynamics also had an impact on how audiences participated and the experiences that they had. Another interviewee with teenage children explained that while they wanted to watch, they had not wanted to appear on screen, whereas she and her husband had joined in on screen:

'my children are sort of the age that it is really embarrassing when your parents do that kind of thing so they tend to just sit there annoyed and kind of embarrassed and say "I don't want them to see me on the camera" but my husband and I were quite happy to interact […] I think there were bits of clapping and they did, with some reluctance, join in. There was some dancing involved in the Time Machine, which my husband and I were very enthusiastic about and that was particularly good at getting my children to cringe'

This comment demonstrates how attitudes to audience participation may differ even within one family (with part of this interviewee's enjoyment deriving from an opportunity to light-heartedly embarrass her children), and how the potential of appearing on screen can have an impact on how audiences participate. Although some audiences were reluctant to appear on screen, others reported actively changing their behaviour either because they knew there was a chance they might appear on screen, or because they wanted to increase their chances of being spot-lit. One respondent said that they had 'thought ahead about what other viewers might be able to see in shot' and another noted that:

'In all honesty, I was probably being a bit more extroverted than normal in order to see if I could get on. It felt a bit like going to the circus and sitting in the front row – the slight frisson in case you might get picked'

Interviewees also reported trying to be spot-lit, saying that they felt a bit disappointed when they did not get picked:

'once you realised you're not appearing you notice that some people are on all the time, so you think: "why not me? am I not interesting enough or whatever?"'

'I do think there is then that expectation that if you're a person who is coming back [to Zoom performance] and then you don't make it on, it's kind of like "aw, wasn't my dog cute enough?"'

The majority of survey respondents who were spot-lit at some point in the performance described the experience in positive terms, saying that they thought it was fun and exciting to be on-screen. Those who described it more negatively – 'self-conscious', 'embarrassed', 'slightly uncomfortable' – often qualified this by saying that they enjoyed appearing on-screen overall despite these feelings. Interestingly, interviewees mentioned that they felt more comfortable appearing on-screen and participating actively on Zoom than they would have done in an in-person performance. One explained that if she'd been in a theatre, she would have felt apprehensive about being part of an immersive performance but explained that she:

> 'felt more free because I was on the camera away from other people and I don't know anybody, I don't see them, they see me for a split second on the screen and that's it. So it was actually probably more freeing. […] it would probably take me a little bit more to get into it in person'

As also discussed in Part 5, this provides evidence that participating via Zoom offered some audience members a low-risk way of engaging in an immersive and interactive performance.

Apart from being excited, questionnaire respondents also explained that being on-screen had made them feel more connected to the performance:

> 'it made me feel part of the audience, and created a fleeting sense of community'

> 'It emphasised our participation in something bigger than/outside of our small family world during lockdown'
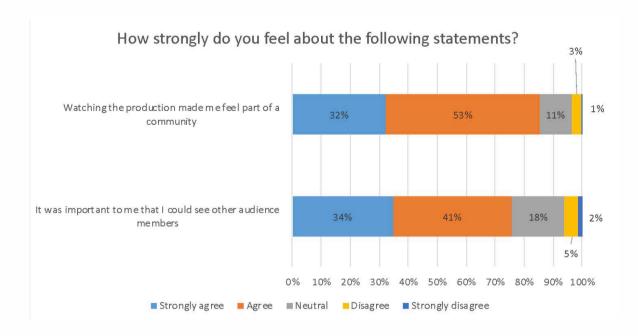
One interviewee explained that he had felt 'a bit of nerves about being on-screen' but that being chosen to ask a question at the start of the performance made him feel like he was 'sort of involved with the performance'. Interviewees also mentioned more generally that the audience participation had made them feel like 'co-conspirators' in the performance, and that participating gave them a sense of 'shared ownership' of the performance.

Audience participation was a key part of the performance for audiences and was vital for making them feel included and part the performance, something that was especially valuable in the context of lockdown. Mostly, audiences were happy to keep their cameras on and were comfortable with the level of participation required, with some actively trying to get themselves noticed to appear on-screen. Privacy was not a prohibiting factor, with the benefits of keeping the camera on outweighing any possible negatives for most, even for those nervous about participating or appearing on-screen. However, providing audiences with information about the level of participation required, as well asbeing clear about their agency to turn their cameras off, is crucial for reassuring audiences.

Creating Community

85% of questionnaire respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that watching the production made them feel part of a community. Community and connection were also regularly mentioned by interviewees as an important aspect of their experiences, taking on extra significance in the context of Covid-19 and lockdown. This section details what audiences said about how participating in the production fostered a sense of community and connection with other people, and what that meant to them.

How strongly do you feel about the following statements?

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Watching the production made me feel part of a community	32%	53%	11%	1%	3%
It was important to me that I could see other audience members	34%	41%	18%	5%	2%

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Watching the audience

When asked what contributed to the sense of community interviewees spoke often about the ability to see other audience members as well as the actors. The questionnaire responses also suggest that being able to see the audience was important to respondents more widely, with 75% agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was important to them.

Interviewees likened being able to see audience members to the in-person theatrical experience, where you would usually be able to see each other:

> 'it was so wonderful to get to see other audience members watching it because that's what a theatrical experience would be, getting to see all the other audience members enjoying it with you'

For others, the Zoom format offered a sense of community that went beyond that of in-person theatre, providing access to the audience in a way that is not usually possible in most theatrical experiences:

> 'a big thing that I loved about this performance was how communal it was, how collegiate, how you see not just the cast but your fellow audience members, almost, I would argue, more so than in a traditional theatre, where you kind of shuffle past them to your seat and see them in profile if you look to your left or whatever, but you're actually right in people's living rooms for moments here and that's really interesting'

> 'you really get a sense of being part of the audience community which you don't get when you go to the theatre so much because you kind of shuffle in in your own world and you watch, you engage with what you are looking at and then you shuffle out and you kind of see other people but you don't really, watching the audience in such a broad range of people in their own different world was almost as enjoyable as the actual theatre'

> '[the audience] were part of the spectacle and you could look at them and have all the joy of being around other people without all the being squashed up and people coughing'

> 'we're seeing into people's living spaces and seeing the people they live with and what was most engaging was seeing families. I loved when they had us hold up our pets to the camera and things

>*like that […] asking us to almost share our lives with them from time to time'*

As the first comment above suggests, the way that interviewees felt about community in the performance often depended on the way that they tended to interact (or not interact) with other audience members at the theatre before lockdown. For those who were used to having little interaction with other audience members, the Zoom format was either a good way of replicating the sense of community they usually felt at the theatre, or a way of enhancing it. For example, one interviewee explained that she usually attended theatre for 'that feeling of being on your own but not on your own', and suggested that The Tempest had:

>*'hit this sweet spot […] where everyone was really missing the feeling of being in the same space as other people. I kind of got that. I didn't want to know much about [the audience], I just wanted to know that they were there, and in the same situation, sitting on the sofa trying to find something to do. I think that was really important'*

For this audience member, then, seeing other audience members participating at the same time and in a similar situation was enough to feel part of a community. Other interviewees, however, explained that they usually got a lot out of chatting to other audience members at the theatre, and that they missed those opportunities to interact:

>*'I do go to theatre on my own and it's nice just to chat to people either side of you and create a conversation about where you go and what you've seen lately […] you haven't got that social aspect at the beginning, in the performance, in the interval and at the end, just chatting to people'*

Not being able to chat with audience members did not result in these audience members feeling completely disconnected. Rather, interviewees often had slightly mixed responses to the question of community. The interviews suggest that social contact is only one of the elements that contributes to a feeling of community in a theatrical experience, and is not something that necessarily matters to all audience members. Nevertheless, a number of interviewees did express a desire for more opportunities to either interact with, or just see, the wider audience:

>*'when you have a Zoom meeting, it starts and you are straight in and then it just cuts out, and I think the beginning and the end could be something that had a bit more of ceremony about it'*

>*'there is still something for me in being there and watching the audience as everyone comes in, feeling part of it. Whereas I think for me where you just came in [to Zoom] it was suddenly like, everyone's there but now we need to watch it on speaker view so we can't watch it on gallery view and I can't look around'*

>*'Maybe time at the beginning, you know I was saying it's nice to see who is in the audience, I would like more of that at the beginning because you kind of had it at the end when people were clapping, and being able to clap and congratulate, that's really important but I would have liked to have a good nose around to see who else was on the Zoom at the beginning'*

Being able to simply see other audience members, however, did have an impact on the experience that audiences had of The Tempest, making them feel more connected to other people at a time of isolation. The power of seeing other audience members was articulated by an interviewee who had watched the pre-recorded production. Even though she was not watching along with the audiences on screen, she reported that she was still able to feel some sense of connection:

'I didn't feel so much like I was part of the community but I was still like, "oh yeah this is a Zoom production there were really other people watching this, that's fun". I think community is quite a strong word for me to use in general […] But that sort of sense of other people and different people being present was still there to some extent in The Tempest, where they showed several people acting on command and doing stuff'

Although those who watched live at the same time as other audiences reported a stronger sense of connection and community, this audience member was able to vicariously participate in that feeling, demonstrating that seeing other audience members on-screen was clearly a particularly successful way of creating a sense of connection and community remotely.

Participating with family and friends

For some audience members, the excitement of seeing others on-screen was enhanced by the fact that they were watching along with physically distant family members and friends, which in turn had an impact on their sense of community. Respondents mentioned how it was exciting for family members and friends watching in other locations to see them, and that they had recognised friends on-screen:

'I know friends and family also watching the show in different locations would get to see me, and find it funny'

'it was very exciting seeing other families we knew appear on screen'

For one interviewee, who watched the same show as her family in another country, the production provided an opportunity to participate in something together. She described being surprised by the ability of the show to create a shared experience:

'I actually saw my other sisters and my Dad even who I haven't seen since December […] and they saw me which was amazing to be honest, it was just really cool. You really felt together, more than you thought, doing a Zoom, you really felt that you were sharing an experience. I thought it might be a little bit cold […] I couldn't believe you actually felt part of it even though I'm sitting in a little apartment by myself in New York'

While the show itself provided a chance to come together, interviewees also spoke of having Zoom calls before and after the production with friends to talk about the experience. Another interviewee said that the show provided an excuse to re-connect with friends and colleagues:

'in April it was still full lockdown so I was looking for any excuse to talk to people really. And it's nice to have something to talk to people about that is not lockdown itself. So it was great to have something that we were really enthusiastic about that we could chat about and we talked for a long time'

Interviewees who watched as a family or a group in-person also said that the experience was valuable in providing something do to as a family, which they found especially valuable at that point in lockdown. Even those who did not know anybody else watching said that they were able to benefit from seeing audience members recognising each other and chatting at the end of the show. One interviewee who watched alone from the US said that she found it particularly moving to see people who knew each other:

'What was really cool is that there were people who knew each other. I didn't know a soul because I'm

> *over here holed up in Georgia but at the end it was fun to listen to people say 'Hey! What's going on?' and there were other people who knew the actors'*
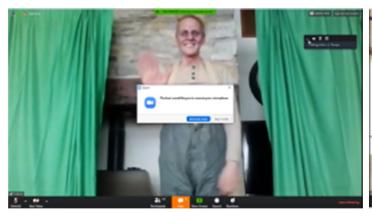
Participating with family and friends, then, added an extra sense of connection and community for audiences, but watching alone did not prevent audiences from feeling part of that community.
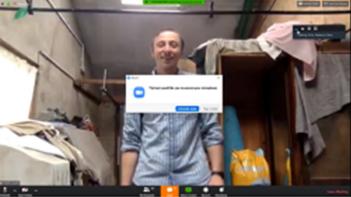
Direct address, audience participation and the end of the show

As well as seeing other audience members and watching with family, respondents also mentioned specific aspects of the production when talking about community and connection. The use of direct address, especially the role of Ariel in addressing the audience and inviting them to participate, was frequently mentioned as something that made audiences feel part of a community. Speaking about whether the production was effective at creating a sense of community, one interviewee explained that she appreciated that 'the audience was not an afterthought. We were Ariel's accomplices, we helped move the story'. Similarly, another interviewee explained that having Ariel directly instruct the audience was essential in establishing a connection between the actors and participants:

> *'I thought Ariel did a great job, her camera view up in her little attic of wonders […] I thought that was perfect for her […] to directly instruct […] I liked the connection that was brought by the actors to the participants directly'*

The other moment of the production that was regularly commented on by respondents and interviewees in relation to community and connection was the ending of the show, in which the actors, to the up-beat disco tune of Erasure's 'Stop' ('We'll be together again. I have been waiting for a long time'), started to dismantle their home 'sets' on screen, taking off their make-up and packing away their greenscreens so that you could see their 'real' home environments. After a curtain call, the audience were encouraged to switch to 'gallery view' and to unmute their microphones so that they could clap and speak to the actors and other audience members.

Audiences found this ending particularly moving. One interviewee explained that she had felt emotional at the joint effort to create the performance:

> *'I just thought that was a really lovely way of signifying that and I guess also the whole, everyone is coming together to make this thing, even though we are under such constraints, that's so beautiful!'*

Others also described the ending of the show as evocative and emotional, something they linked to the sense of communal effort, as well as missing being around other people at the time:

'the journey towards that ending I thought was really well put together and really heartfelt. I was shocked to feel like, my gosh, I actually feel like I felt something from a Zoom performance!'

'the sort of ritualised unmasking and taking down of the green screens was very clever. But I think the flipside of that same coin was just waving to the audience and seeing people kind of sat around their sofas with their cats and their kids and whatever, lots of different groups and individuals, and just like, "gosh, humanity is out there!". Kind of pseudo-profound, but it was just society again in a way that I didn't realise just how much I'd missed in that sense. So that was kind of, you know magnified by the times but still a very real feeling. And it's persisted, but in a quieter and more expected way, in subsequent shows I've seen'

A sense of community and connection was also mentioned as important by respondents when asked if they kept their camera on at the end of the show, and if they did, what they enjoyed about the experience. Again, audiences mentioned the opportunity to see and talk to those that they knew in the audience and that this moment helped to create a sense of community:

'Loved the feeling of being part of something bigger, it felt very unifying in early lockdown'

'Left it on and heard my best friend on the west coast say hi to me, and then my other friends do the same. It was awesome'

'found it v moving. Was first experience of live art in nearly two months and it wrecked me!'

'Given it was the height of the lockdown period, and although I did not know anyone else taking part, it was heartening to see people engage with friends and family'

'Wonderful to be part of a live event – especially at a time when the idea of group events felt almost impossible'

Others also said that they appreciated the opportunity not only to connect with other audience members, but to see the cast and crew and to show their appreciation:

'Watching them change from being characters to actors [was] fascinating'

'Seeing the cast in their homes sometimes with their own families emphasised that theatre is always a joint/shared enterprise between human players and human audience whatever the technology involved'

'I enjoyed the chance to applaud individual performers and see other audience members'

'We left our camera on and it was a highlight of the show! It was great to be able to show your appreciation to the actors, wave to family and it generally created a feeling of togetherness'

The responses to the question of community in the production illustrate the multiple ways that community can be built and experienced as part of an online performance. The emotional responses that audiences had to seeing other audience members and feeling part of a shared enterprise need to be seen as conditioned by the context of early lockdown. Regardless of that, they demonstrate that it is possible to create a sense of community via an online performance, especially if that performance is live and invites
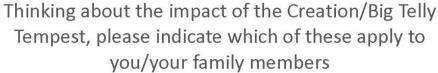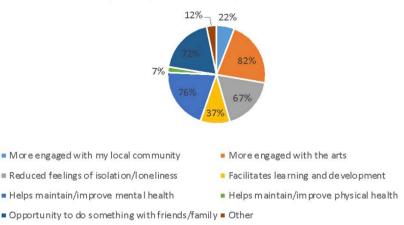
the active and visible participation of the audience. Doing so may, in fact, be particularly affecting, powerful and engaging for audiences.

Summary: Audience Experience
- The majority of audiences enjoyed their experience of watching the Zoom Tempest
- Audiences enjoyed the look and style of the production and found the experience engaging, uplifting and often emotionally moving.
- Watching live was important to the overwhelming majority of audiences, with audiences enjoying the unpredictability of live performance, sharing the experience with other audience members, and the ability to actively participate in the production.
- Audience participation was particularly enjoyable for audiences, and the majority of respondents were happy to keep their cameras on to enable such participation.
- Despite being a remote production, audiences were able to feel like they were connected with the actors and other audience members and as though they were part of a community.
- Being able to see other audience members, the use of direct address, and participating with family and friends were key to creating this sense of community among audience members.

The Tempest's impact on its audiences

Thinking about the impact of the Creation/Big Telly Tempest, please indicate which of these apply to you/your family members

- More engaged with my local community
- More engaged with the arts
- Reduced feelings of isolation/loneliness
- Facilitates learning and development
- Helps maintain/improve mental health
- Helps maintain/improve physical health
- Opportunity to do something with friends/family
- Other

Maintaining mental wellbeing and reducing feelings of isolation
76% of questionnaire respondents said that watching The Tempest had helped to maintain or improve their mental health, and, reflecting the comments about community, 67% said that participating had reduced feelings of isolation or loneliness. As one interviewee explained, lockdown had a huge impact on his level of social interaction and he used online productions to replace those social experiences:

'my social calendar has been totally wrecked because I used to be out 5 or so nights a week going to clubs and societies and this, that, and the other, and that just stopped. And at that point, I welcomed finding online productions'

Respondents described finding being able to connect through performance emotionally moving, as well as providing a mental escape:

'watching live Zoom productions has been very profoundly moving for me emotionally, just because we

are so isolated right now, we've been stuck inside for months and months and seeing people do things really well and really skilfully […] is just very heartening and encouraging and moving'

'lockdown was hard, it's been hard for everyone […] it just brought some lightness, some entertainment, some escapism in the best possible way […] a kind of a feeling of communion with other people'

'It was heartening to be focussing in with others/strangers at a time of mental and physical isolation. Boosted me emotionally'

'It meant a lot to me — I was feeling quite estranged from live theatre […] so it was really moving to be able to feel part of an audience again — I loved the sense of community, and the playfulness with the form.'

'I really felt this love for the audience to bring something to people in a time when people can't get out, when people are stuck, when people really are lonely and feel hopeless'

As well as reducing feelings of isolation, 72% of respondents said that participating gave them the opportunity to do something with friends or family. Interviewees explained that the production gave them something to look forward to, and to talk about afterwards, both of which they described as mentally and emotionally uplifting. For example, one interviewee described getting dressed up and treating the production as she would a trip to the theatre:

'I got my face on and I treated it like it was an event because I have no events. I treated it like I was attending something and it really gave me something to look forward to all day'

Another interviewee described how it had felt like attending an event, explaining that

'it felt for us like we'd actually had a night out, both of us felt like we'd participated in an occasion and that was really good afterwards'

The same interviewee said that participating had given them something to talk about, which was fairly significant in lockdown:

'it has been a thing that I've talked to people about. When you are in a lockdown situation, nobody has any news. So you can say…we've watched Creation Theatre'

By providing an exciting, live event for audiences to look forward to, and by fostering community and connection within that event, the production was able to boost the mental wellbeing of audiences as well as reducing feelings of isolation at a time when opportunities for social interaction were very limited.

Providing Hope and Inspiration

Respondents also said that watching The Tempest was an experience that provided them with a great deal of hope about the future of theatre. This sentiment was especially common from those with a professional interest in the theatre industry, but was also voiced by respondents with no obvious professional connection:

'it felt good to actually see a theatre put a lot of work and effort and make this work in a real way. That

was inspiring. It has definitely re-inspired me to pursue some different things'

'came away feeling like I'd learnt something […] I'd never quite seen anything like that before, this is a new and exciting way of doing theatre, that's so cool'

'it was one of those productions I've found in my life as an artist at certain times when I start to feel very discouraged it never fails that there's some performance that comes through that makes me think about something differently […] it just really opened me up to starting to think about what things could like for me and my students'

'It literally changed my life. Suddenly I could see a path to using Zoom backgrounds as a storytelling tool, a creative visual element I might be able to work in myself. But more so — more unexpectedly — it opened my eyes to the medium. The production's playfulness, its theatricality and its live nature were all much more effective than I'd imagined possible. This was tremendously exciting, and seeing people — the audience, the cast — was surprisingly moving. In short it felt live and immediate, and has led me on to pursuing Zoom based theatre as a way to work myself'

As well as providing hope and inspiration in the shorter term, some respondents said that the production had an impact on their longer-term thinking about theatre, especially related to theatre's accessibility for different audience groups. For example, one interviewee, who leads a theatre group for disabled artists, reflected that the show made her think about the opportunities for integrating accessibility functions into Zoom theatre, making it more inclusive:

'for my own work I'm also exploring creative access at the moment including audio description and BSL […] to actually be able to have parts of that on Zoom I think will be incredibly exciting and break down some barriers'

An immediate and key impact of the production was inspiring both audiences and theatre professionals, demonstrating that it is possible to create engaging, exciting and financially viable work for audiences over Zoom, even at a time when actors and audiences were unable to be in the same space. However, it also inspired theatre professionals and artists to think in a more long-term way about how this format might be used in the future to create accessible digital forms of theatre.

Other Impacts

Although interviewees tended not to comment on it as an impact of the production, 82% of questionnaire respondents said that watching The Tempest had made them feeling more engaged with the arts, suggesting that Zoom theatre and other online experiences could be an effective way of continuing to engage audiences throughout the pandemic and beyond.

Learning and development was also mentioned as an impact of the production, particularly by those who watched because their children were studying the play at school.

Summary: Impacts

- Maintaining mental health and wellbeing, and reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness were key impacts of the production on audiences. Audiences described having something to look forward to, the feeling of participating as part of a community during the production, and having something to talk to other people about afterwards as contributing to their mental health and decreasing isolation.

- The production provided hope and inspiration about the future of the theatre industry, especially for those audience members with a professional interest in theatre.
- Watching the production made audiences feel more engaged with the arts, suggesting that Zoom theatre could have longer-term impacts on audience development.

Appendix A: Creative Staff Questionnaire

Digital Theatre Transformation:
A Case Study and Digital Toolkit for Small to Mid-Scale Theatres in England

Researchers: Pascale Aebischer and Rachael Nicholas

Section 1
Project Funding, Review, Contact Details and Participant consent
1. I confirm that I have read the above information for this project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

⊙ yes

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the questionnaire and the subsequent interview at any time without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected. After the interview, I will be able to withdraw up until the point of publication.

⊙ yes

3. I understand that relevant sections of the original data collected during the study, may be looked at by members of the research team, Pascale Aebischer and Rachael Nicholas, and Creation Theatre, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.

⊙ yes

4. I understand that taking part involves identifiable video recordings to be used by the research team for the purposes of transcribing the interview.

yes

5. I understand that taking part involves identifiable interview transcripts and questionnaire responses to be used for the purposes of Reports published on the Creation Theatre website, the University of Exeter Open Research Repository, the Independent Theatre Council, UK Theatre, the Society of London Theatre and in future academic publications, conference papers and other outputs (online/in print) by the research team aimed at academic and general audiences.

⊙ yes

6. I would like a chance to review the transcript of the interview before it is used in publications and consent to my contact details being stored and used for this purpose.

⊙ yes
⊙ no

7. I agree to take part in the above project.

⊙ yes

8. Please give us your name and email address, which we will use to contact you to arrange the follow-up interview at a time within the next 10 days that is convenient for you. We will use your answers to this questionnaire as a starting point for our conversation with you.

Section 2

Part 1: moving a theatre company online

This is a set of questions that is aimed at working out how the move online has affected the everyday running of Creation Theatre and how it has affected working patterns and the relationships and skills sets of staff within the company. Please skip whatever questions you don't feel apply to you, and give a full answer to the questions which touch on your contribution to the work done by the company. Please indicate in your answer if there is lots for you to say that you would rather discuss during the interview than type up; if that's the case, it would be helpful if you could give us some bullet points about your particular area of expertise or the things you can tell us about more so that we know what to concentrate on when we talk to you.

9. Could you briefly describe your role within the company?

10. Has the move online changed your role within the company and your working relationships with other members of the company? if so, how?

11. What additional equipment have you needed in order to continue working effectively from home?
- ○ PC/laptop
- ○ webcam
- ○ microphone
- ○ lights
- ○ green screen
- ○ broadband upgrade
- ○ mobile phone
- ○ other

12. How has working online affected how and when you work?

13. How has working from home affected boundaries and expectations regarding the balance between work and life and what steps did you and/or Creation Theatre take to protect your own privacy and work/life boundaries?

14. How do you rate the change to your work patterns resulting from the move online? 1 = very difficult, very negative experience 2 = difficult, mostly negative experience 3 = not that different from my normal experience of work 4 = a mostly positive experience, with some challenges but also positive changes 5 = a highly positive experience, work has become easier

1 2 3 4 5

15. How has working online affected your sense of wellbeing? In your answer, try to focus on the impact of the mode of working separate from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. If you feel that the two cannot be disentangled, please state this in your answer.

16. Within your role, what environmental benefits do you find have come from digital home working?

17. Within your role, what negative environmental impacts have come from digital home working?

Section 3
Creating a production for Zoom

In this part of the questionnaire, we ask you about creating a production for Zoom affected the work of creative staff. You need only answer questions that are relevant to your role. Please indicate if there is lots for you to say that you would rather discuss in interview than type up; if that's the case, it would be helpful if you could give us some bullet points about the topics you have a lot to say about so that we know what to concentrate on when we talk to you.

22. How did your responsibilities change as a result of shifting from face-to-face theatre to Zoom?

23. What new skills did you have to develop in order to shift to Zoom?

24. What training did you need in order to shift to Zoom?

25. How did doing a Zoom production affect (a) scenic design (b) lighting design (c) sound design (d) props (e) costumes?

26. How did the shift to Zoom affect rehearsals in terms of (a) length, (b) frequency (c) content (d) relationships between performers (e) directorial style?

27. How did the shift to Zoom affect dramaturgy? How did it affect the role of the director?

28. How did the shift to Zoom affect your approach to performance and getting into character?

29. What can you do with Zoom that you can't do on stage?

30. How important are the following aspects of Zoom performance

	Very important	Somewhat important	neutral	Somewhat unimportant	Not at all important
talking to the audience	◌	◌	◌	◌	◌
active audience participation	◌	◌	◌	◌	◌
seeing your audience	◌	◌	◌	◌	◌
seeing the other performers	◌	◌	◌	◌	◌
seeing yourself perform	◌	◌	◌	◌	◌

31. What are the main artistic, personal, and commercial challenges that arise from Zoom performance?

32. What are the main technological challenges that arise from Zoom performance?

33. What were your solutions to the challenges you mentioned in your previous two answers?

34. What are the main opportunities (artistic, personal, commercial) that arise from Zoom performance?

35. What are the main things you learned from the shift to using Zoom as a performance medium?

36. Can you offer 3 key pieces of advice to other theatre companies and performers who are about to shift to Zoom performance and online modes of working?

Appendix B: Audience Questionnaire

The anonymised Audience Questionnaire responses are archived and available at https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Digital_Theatre_Transformation_Audience_Questionnaire_anon_xlsx/13076963.

Digital Theatre Transformation:
A Case Study and Digital Toolkit for Small to Mid-Scale Theatres in England

Researchers: Pascale Aebischer and Rachael Nicholas

Section 1

Project funding, Organisation, Research Team contact and Participant Consent

1. I confirm that I have read the above information sheet for this project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

    ○ yes

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am free to withdraw from completing the questionnaire at any time without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

    ○ yes

3. I understand that at the end of the questionnaire, I will be asked to provide my name and email address if I am willing to be contacted for an interview. I understand that if I have not provided these details, I will not be able to withdraw after the questionnaire has been completed, since my contributions will no longer be identifiable.

    ○ yes

4. I understand that relevant sections of the original data collected during the study may be looked at by members of the research team, Pascale Aebischer and Rachael Nicholas, and Creation Theatre, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.

    ○ yes

5. I understand that taking part involves anonymised questionnaire responses to be used for the purposes of: Reports published on the websites of Creation Theatre, the Independent Theatre Council, UK Theatre, the Society of London Theatre, as well as in the University of Exeter Open Research Repository and in future publications, conference papers and other outputs (online/in print) by the research team aimed at academic and general audiences

    ○ yes

6. I agree that, if provided in the questionnaire, my contact details can be kept securely and used by researchers from the research team until November 2021 to contact me about taking part in future research.

    ○ yes

7. I agree to take part in the above project.

    ○ yes

Section 2
Context of watching

8. When did you watch Creation Theatre/Big Telly's Zoom Tempest?

9. How did you find out about the Zoom Tempest?
    Creation Theatre email
    Twitter
    Other social media
    Newspaper review
    Word of Mouth
    Tickets were purchased for me
    Other

10. Where in the world did you watch the performance? Please name the country and, if you are based in the UK, the first part of your postcode.

11. Where in your home did you watch the performance? If you moved around, please select all that apply.
    Living area
    Kitchen
    Bedroom
    Dining area
    Study or office
    Garden
    Watched outside of my home
    Other

12. What device did you watch the performance on? If this was a combination of devices (e.g. on a laptop but connected to a television), please specify.

13. Who did you watch the performance with? Please select all that apply.
    alone in my home
    with one other person in my home
    with a group in my home
    with family watching from a separate home
    with a friend watching from a separate home
    with friends/family watching from multiple separate homes

14. Why did you want to take part in the performance? Please select all that apply.
    Something different to do
    Interested in the format
    Supporting Creation Theatre or Big Telly
    I miss theatre in lockdown
    I wanted to watch some Shakespeare
    I wanted to support the arts scene in my local community
    I was interested in seeing a new take on a story
    Other

Section 3
How you watched

15. Did you prepare for the performance in any way? Please select all that apply.
    snacks/drink
    organised the viewing area
    organised my schedule
    read the play
    read up on the play
    read up on the company
    Other

16. Did you do any of the following whilst watching the performance? Please select all that apply.
    eat/drink
    move around
    watch something else
    post on social media
    look at social media
    message someone watching the show in a different location
    other

17. Did you do any of the following after watching the performance? Please select all that apply.
    Post on social media
    Follow the company on social media
    Book another Creation show
    Look for other online theatre experiences
    Discussed the show with the people I watched with at home
    Discussed the show with people who watched the show from separate locations
    Discussed the show with people who had not seen it
    Other

18. Whilst watching the show would you say you were:
    Completely focused on the show
    Mostly focused on the show
    Somewhat focused on the show but often distracted
    Distracted most of the time

19. If you felt distracted, tell us briefly about what distracted you.

Section 4
Using Zoom's videoconferencing technology

20. How easy did you find it to understand and use the technology (Zoom) e.g. muting and unmuting your audio and video?
      Very easy
      easy
      Neutral
      difficult
      very difficult

21. If you found the technology difficult to use, what further advance information or guidance could Creation have provided that you would have found helpful?

22. To what extent did watching the show help your confidence with videoconferencing more generally?
      did not help at all
      did not help much
      made no difference
      helped a bit
      helped a lot

23. If you had technical issues (e.g. poor connection), can you tell us about them?

24. If you watched a live performance, did you keep your camera switched on during the show?
      Yes
      No
      For parts of the show

25. If you appeared on screen during the show, how did this make you feel?

26. Please tell us briefly about what you did at the end of the show. Did you turn your camera off right away or did you leave it on for a while? If you left it on, what did you enjoy about the experience of seeing the cast and the other members of the audience?

Section 5
Your experience of the show

27. Please select how strongly you feel about the following statements. If you watched the pre-recorded version, please ignore the final statement.

	strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoyed the experience of watching the show	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt like I was an important part of the production	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Watching the production made me feel part of a community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It was important to me that I could see other audience members	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It was important to me that the production was 'live' and that I was watching as the actors performed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

28. Research suggests that people who attend live theatre and other type of live performance can benefit in the following ways. Thinking about the Creation Theatre/Big Telly The Tempest, please indicate which of these apply to you and/or your family members. Select all that apply:
- More engaged with my local community
- More engaged with the arts
- Reduced feelings of isolation/loneliness
- Facilitates learning and development
- Helps maintain/improve mental wellbeing
- Helps maintain/improve physical wellbeing
- Opportunity to do something with friends/family
- Other

29. Thinking about the performance itself, please comment on what you thought about the 'look' of the production? (e.g. Did you enjoy how the production looked, would you have preferred a more 'polished' look, what did you think about any technical 'glitches'?)

30. What was your favourite moment or aspect of the performance?

31. How important was it to you that the play was by Shakespeare?
- Extremely important
- Somewhat important
- Neutral
- Somewhat not important
- Extremely not important

32. Please state how likely it is that you would want to watch the following content as a Zoom performance

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Very unlikely
A new play	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
An adaptation of a well-known play or novel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A musical	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A tragedy/'serious' drama	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A ballet/dance theatre	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
An opera	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A concert	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

33. Did you think your experience was good value for money? If you participated in the research performances on 11 or 12 July and feel comfortable doing so, please comment here on how much you chose to pay and why.

34. Would you: (please select all that apply)
    Pay to watch a live Zoom theatre production again during lockdown or whilst theatres are closed
    Pay to watch a live Zoom theatre production again at any time even when theatres re-open
    Pay to watch a recorded Zoom show during lockdown or whilst theatres are closed
    Pay to watch a recorded Zoom show at any time
    Only watch a Zoom theatre show again if it is free
    Other

Section 6
About you

35. Before lockdown, how often did you attend live theatre performances?
    Very frequently (once a week or more)
    Quite Frequently (every fortnight or so)
    Fairly frequently (once a month or every few months)
    Rarely (once a year)
     Never

36. Please select the most appropriate statement. Before watching this production I:
    Had not heard of Creation Theatre
    Had heard of Creation Theatre but had never seen a production
    Had seen one Creation Theatre production
    Had seen many Creation Theatre productions

37. Please select the most appropriate statement. Before watching this production I:
    Had never watched theatre online, on television or in the cinema
    Had seen theatre in the cinema or on television but never online
    Had seen some theatre productions online
    Had seen lots of theatre online

38. What is your age?
    16-25
    26-35
    36-45
    46-55
    56-65
    65-75
    75+
    prefer not to say

39. How would you describe your gender?
    Woman
    Man
    Prefer not to say
    Other

40. How would you describe your race or ethnicity?

41. Please tell us here if you have any other comments about the experience of watching the Zoom Tempest and what it meant to you, or if there is a topic you would particularly like to talk about or avoid in a follow-up interview.

42. We would like to interview audience members over Zoom about their experiences. Please tell us whether you would be happy to be contacted with more information about taking part in these interviews. If you don't wish to be contacted, just write 'no interview'. If you are agreeing to an interview, which will take approximately thirty minutes, please leave your preferred name and email address in the space below. We will contact you shortly to arrange a convenient time for the interview and will use your answers to this questionnaire to guide our questions. In that email, there will be a link to a Participant Information and Consent form which we have to ask you to fill in before we can have the interview. If you do not leave your contact details, your questionnaire will automatically be anonymous and you won't be able to withdraw your consent to its being used once you have submitted the questionnaire.

Acknowledgements