

ANNUAL REPORT FROM WRiTEON'S ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

1st April 2017 to 31st December 2017

1. Introduction

Following the decision to change our reporting period to calendar years, this report covers the period from 1st April 2017 to 31st December 2017.

Throughout these 9 months WRiTEON has continued to provide support and services for writers to develop their writing. We offered a range of opportunities for writers to write new work, workshop their writing, receive feedback on their work, see it rehearsed or publicly performed.

2. Projects

Between April and December, we have run or produced the following projects:

Pavement Is My Pillow
Get It Write workshops
Individual Feedback Service
WRiTEON plays with history
First Stage winter 2017 season

We have also worked towards putting on another edition of our playwriting course Right for the Stage for writers with no or little experience, start a series of Masterclasses for more experienced writers (both of these to start in spring 2018) and building towards a big new writing festival (to take place in 2019) and various other projects with individuals and organisations which are still being developed.

Pavement Is My Pillow

Building on our workshops held at Jimmy's in autumn 2014, this collaborative writing project started in autumn 2016 and resulted in a fully staged production of a 50 minute play, co-written by 5 writers, directed and artistically led by Richard Peoples. The play was WRiTEON's contribution to Cambridge Drama Festival and was performed at the Mumford theatre in April 2017. Both audience and expert feedback we received was extremely positive with some suggestions on simplification of the staging from the festival adjudicator. The project overall involved 5 writers, 1 director/producer, 1 dramaturge, 10 actors, 1 lighting designer/techie and 2 costume/set designers. One of our actors (Helen Holgate) won an award for best supporting role. Whilst we initially thought about asking the writers to extend the play and produce a week-long run of the longer play in one of Cambridge's venues, we later decided that it is better to invest our producing power in a new project.

Get It Write workshops

These script development sessions are run by Julia Bolden, Kim Komljanec and Richard McNally and are held quarterly (sometimes closer and sometimes further apart to avoid clashes with any other projects we are running simultaneously). Writers who are interested to have their writing workshoped, submit an extract from their scripts by the advertised deadline which is usually app. 2 weeks in advance of each workshop. WRiTEON casts the plays and provides directors to work on the scripts, giving writers an insight into how their play works on stage. The preparatory work done by the directors is in-depth whilst the writers also benefit from the spoken feedback given to them on the day by directors, actors or other writers.

Writers pay a small participation fee to cover the costs of the venue hire and a symbolic fee to the participating directors for their preparatory work on the plays. Actors are not compensated as a) this is not financially viable and b) their involvement is not as time-consuming as that of the directors.

On the day, each script is workshoped for one hour (writers are encouraged to stay for the

whole day). In general, we have been getting between 2 and 4 submissions with very little/no publicity, but recently (Jan 2018) we have seen a rise in the number of applications after the news about the upcoming workshop got picked up by the London Playwrights' Newsletter and we got 6 submissions from London and further afield. We are hoping to build on this for future workshops, but will also need to look into costings as the affordable library venue has recently become unavailable, meaning the cost of the venue hire has increased significantly.

In the months this report relates to, we held 2 Get It Write workshops: one on 7th May and one on 24th Sept with our winter one being pushed into January to avoid clashing with First Stage season and busy Christmas period.

Individual feedback service

Is offered to writers on our website and is a paid service. Several writers have used our individual feedback service over the past few months and have given us extremely positive feedback on it. This reassures us that the service is indeed needed and well delivered. At the moment our main feedback provider is Kim Komljanec who offers different feedback options to suit different writers' needs.

First Stage Winter 2017 season

First Stage is our regular season of staged readings of short plays or extract from longer plays. At the time of writing this report, the committee has not yet had a chance to hear the full report on the last First Stage season, so this is just a brief summary with some of the numbers missing. These will be added in before this report is published on our website.

The artistic directors and producers First Stage Winter 2017 season were James Stedman and Izzy Rees.

The call for scripts was published in September (deadline 17th Sept) and was open to writers who are WRiTEON paid up members and asked for scripts of up to 30 minutes for one to six actors. It also specified some subjects the writers were advised to avoid. XX scripts were received and out of those 13 were selected for performance by a reading panel consisting of XX readers.

The novelty of this edition of First Stage was using a repertory company of XX actors in the attempt to avoid complicated casting process, last-minute drop-outs and other issues arising from unreliability of cast members who have often let us down at the last minute in our previous seasons. We therefore decided to offer actors the challenge of playing several roles and being involved in more than one of our season's evenings to hopefully give them a bigger opportunity of exposure and a higher sense of commitment to the project. Using a rep actors' company meant some casting wasn't as age specific as the writers have foreseen, but the quality of the performance remained at the high level of our previous seasons, or in some cases significantly higher. However, using a rep company for the first time also proved to be a challenge when planning rehearsals with different directors and cast overlaps.

Another challenge for this season was securing the performance venue as our initial booking of the function room above The Boathouse pub for the three planned evenings got changed at a very short notice. Luckily, artistic directors/producers handled the situation well and found a replacement performance venue at the Golden Hind pub's function room for the first two evenings of the season whilst the last one remained at the Boathouse.

Finally, First Stage Winter 2017 season saw the rehearsed readings of 13 scripts by 11 writers, directed by XX directors over three nights (19th and 26th November and 3rd December). We also had XX techies and XX FOH volunteers involved. The format of the evenings remained the same with opportunity for spoken feedback and paper forms for written feedback from the audience. The tickets sold well (via Brown Paper Tickets) and in fact two out of three nights were sold out.

Overall, the First Stage Winter 2017 season was a success but even with a rep company, these seasons are proving to be logistically very demanding so the committee will need to think thoroughly whether in the future a simpler format might be as beneficial to the writers and not present quite as big a commitment for the producers.

WRiTEON plays with history

After successfully delivering our first collaborative project between WRiTEON and the National Trust, WRiTEON was invited to collaborate with Wimpole Hall again in the following year. Again, the idea was to put on a collaborative project this time inspired by the history of the Wimpole Hall and produce two evenings of original drama at Wimpole in July 2017.

The project preparation started in the summer and autumn of 2016 and the creative process for the writers, supported by Sean Lang (historian and mentor) and Kim Komljanec (dramaturge and writing mentor) lasted up until end of April with several stages of feedback given to the writers and a staged read-through in March 2017.

Final drafts of the plays were then received in the beginning of May, ready to be cast and rehearsed later in the year (May and June 2017) with the support of producer Julia Bolden.

11 short plays written by 11 writers were rehearsed and fully staged by 12 directors and 28 actors, with live music (by 1 musician) and projection (1 techie) at Wimpole's Old Restaurant on Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd July 2017. Most plays got two showings and some were only being shown on one of the nights, due to time restrictions. Both nights were well attended, though not entirely sold out which was due to lack of publicity agreed with our partners at Wimpole. Nevertheless, all plays were received well by the audience and we received plenty of informal verbal and written positive feedback from writers, actors, directors and audience members.

Whilst at this point there are no plans for collaborations with Wimpole Estate, there may be other organisations that we decide to work with and create similar collaborative projects with in the future.

3. Membership count

With the change in the reporting period, we have also decided to change the membership payment period to calendar years. Currently, our membership count is XX

4. Structural changes and looking ahead

Perhaps WRiTEON's largest challenges identified by the committee and partially addressed by recent changes in the decision-making committee structure (these changes are explained in the previous annual report) are publicity and communications. Both advertising our projects to the wider public as well as communicating with our membership/supporters pool have been challenging. The internal communication with members has been improved in the past few months by Izzy Rees who has taken over the newsletter. Our regular social meetings have also improved our communication with those who are already or have been in the past) involved with WRiTEON, however our general publicity still needs to be addressed so that we can reach more potential audience members, workshop participants and writers, actors, directors in general. Led by Publicity and Communications Coordinator Emma Harpley, the committee members are working hard to improve our publicity and online presence. Richard McNally has worked hard on renovating and updating our website whilst all committee members have contributed to improving our publicity in various ways (media contacts, establishing relationships with other local writing groups, using Meetup as a potential way of communicating and building a sense of a writing community in Cambridge etc.), so we will hopefully see the results of these endeavours in the year ahead with the projects we are planning getting a wider response and their publicity reaching more people. The programming decisions for 2018 have not yet been finalised, but here are some of the projects which WRiTEON will be offering or continue to offer to its members and supporters in the year ahead:

1. Playwriting course for writers with little or no experience (8 sessions in spring 2018, dates and venue tbc)
2. Masterclass series for more experienced writers (quarterly, with first one in spring 2018)
3. Get It Write workshops (one session in spring, one in the autumn and one in the

- winter)
4. Individual feedback service
 5. Open call for scripts with an opportunity for supported development process for the writers and a view to select 6 one act plays and stage them as part of our festival in 2019.
 6. Writing and dramaturgy workshop as part of Cambridge Drama festival 2018

The delivery of all of these and other possible projects will depend on the involvement and commitment of our members and supporters beyond the committee. Recently, WRiTEON's projects have relied mostly upon the work of its committee members, but it has become clear that we will need to get more active involvement from the membership and supporters' circles to bring some of these exciting ideas to fruition. Another major change in WRiTEON is coming up in the early summer when our current Artistic Director will be moving abroad and therefore stepping down so WRiTEON will soon be looking for a new artistic director.

5. WRiTEON's Decision-making Committee

WRiTEON's committee currently (January 2018) consists of 9 members, namely:

1. Business and Finance Manager and treasurer – Isabel Rees
2. Artistic Director – Kim Komljanec
3. Publicity and Communications Coordinator – Emma Harpley
4. Richard McNally (Website content manager)
5. Richard Peoples
6. Trish Rawson
7. Leigh Chambers
8. James Stedman
9. David Monksfield (Deputy Treasurer)

It should be noted that every single one of the committee members put in a lot of their time, skills and hard work and those who don't have a specific role listed next to their name are equally involved in running and/or supporting various projects or tasks, be it creative work or organisational responsibilities, admin tasks or practical support. The range of their work is such that WRiTEON could not provide the projects we do without any one of these people.

There are also many others who work with us and deserve to be thanked at least once a year: our actors, directors, producers and casting directors, techies, FOH helpers and many others who support us in various ways. So, thank you. You know who you are.

Most importantly, of course, thank you to the writers whose work, development and creative ideas are at the heart of everything we do.

Keep writing and we will do our best to support you and help you develop your skills.

Kim Komljanec,
Artistic Director of WRiTEON,
January 2018.