

Artistic Directors' 2020 Report

It has been an exciting and transformative year for WRiTEON. The committee were delighted that Julia Bolden accepted our invitation to return to the committee. Richard and Julia agreed to co-chair and share the mantle of Artistic Director. Invigorated by their new collaborative leadership, they dedicated themselves to delivering a thrilling year of theatre. With 2020 being such a disaster for live theatre in general, we are delighted that WRiTEON has managed to adapt and deliver a truly inclusive programme of theatrical opportunities for our members and affiliated artists, through our Zoomologues series. Steve Waters was also able to deliver a writing workshop over Zoom in September. We have had submission calls open during the year, which means that we have projects in the pipeline ready for when venues reopen. Finally, we have worked hard to reinvent our membership package, offering our members more for less!

Zoomologues

The vision for our Zoomologues project was to give our members and affiliated artists a creative outlet at a time when they needed it the most. The design of the project was for writers to submit new short plays specifically for Zoom, that would be performed by actors on a private call for the writers, actors, committee and invited guests. What started initially as a trial of the format developed into four very successful rounds, on different themes.

Zoomologues Confessionals

The title of the first round was *Confessionals*. Each play had to be a monologue wherein the central character must make some kind of confession. We produced 12 of these, spread over two evenings in May.

Monday 25th May

THE JOB THEY PAID ME FOR by Aga Serugo-Lugo
NOW WE ARE FOUR by Helen Mulligan
LOVE IN LOCKDOWN by Sue Whitney
WHEELY BIN NIGHTMARE by John Tordoff
THE BIG TREE by Alan Morgan
THE FINAL CONFESSION by Philip Blakely

Thursday 28th May

JANET by James Stedman
ASKING FOR IT by Bianca Eglinton
PASTA PASTA by Sean Lang
THE NECKLACE by Julia Bolden
BESTIES IN LOCKDOWN by Nicolas Ridley
CORIANDER by Claire Day

The writers interpreted the theme in stories that ran the gamut of humorous mundane confessions to earth-shattering dramatic confessions.

First & Last

The title of the second round was *First and Last*. The plays had to be monologues that made use of the concept of first and last, but that could be interpreted however the writer wished. We staged 12 plays over two nights in June/July.

Monday 29th June

FIRST DRAFT, LAST WRITES by Aga Serugo-Lugo
WAITING IN THE WINGS by Clare Day
PECKING ORDER by Liz Barker
THE MONSTER by Pamela Jenner
THEN AND NOW by Richard McNally
END TO END by Julia Bolden

Thursday 2nd July

THE FIRST STEP by Sandra Birnie
JUST A FEW QUESTIONS by Julia Bolden
THE MUM'S RACE by Leigh Chambers
THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST by Sean Lang
FIRST THINGS FIRST by Sandra Birnie
THE WHOLE HOG by Colin Simpson

The writers found creative approaches to the theme, which led to a broad range of topics and styles.

Gallery

The next round, “Zoomologues Gallery”, was more conceptual, with writers encouraged to create monologues inspired by famous paintings. 12 plays were performed over 2 nights in August:

Monday 24th August

OUR PARADISE by Helen Mulligan (inspired by *Adam and Little Eve* by Paul Klee),
THE END OF INNOCENT by Sean Lang (inspired by *Pope Innocent X* by Velazquez),
HIGH TEA IN THE 1890s by Philip Blakely (inspired by *Lady at The Tea Table* by Mary Cassatt)

DISGRUNTLED by Kirsty Smith (inspired by *Teaser 1* by Balthus)
OCTAVIA HILL by Karen Merrison (inspired by *Octavia Hill* by John Singer Sargeant),
HIS PEARL by Richard Latham (inspired by *Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Johannes Vermeer)

Thursday 27th August

COURBET’S PANDEMIC by Barbara Anderson (inspired by *Desperate Man* by Gustave Courbet)

ALL YOU SEE ARE PEARLS by Aga Serugo-Lugo (inspired by *Euphemia Toussaint* by Anthony Meucci)

SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS by Richard Peoples (inspired by *Lady at The Tea Table* by Mary Cassatt)

MAD HESTER by Sandra Birnie (inspired by *A Madwoman and Compulsive Gambler* by Theodore Gericault)

REMY by James Stedman (inspired by *Self-portrait with Dishevelled Hair* by Rembrandt) FROM THE HORSE’S MOUTH by Clare Day (inspired by *Anne of Cleves* by Hans Holbein)

Whilst some paintings were offered as suggestions, many writers selected their own paintings for inspiration. We were pleased that some writers chose to focus on the historical subjects of the paintings whilst others created new characters inspired by those depicted. This meant that there was a compelling variety to both evenings.

Zoomologues Duologues

Our last round of the year was *Zoomologues Duologues*, where we branched out into plays performed, on Zoom, by two actors in separate locations. With an adjustment to the Zoom settings, this was perfectly achievable and worked well. Twelve plays were performed over two evenings in October. Writers were also offered the opportunity on this round to co-write and/or to perform their work themselves.

Monday 12th October

HE THINKS IT’S ALL OVER by Carla Keen
PERCY PIGS by Clare Day

CONFESSION by Barbara Anderson
TIME FOR CHANGE by Julia Bolden
THE SEED by Bianca Eglinton
HARD TO TELL by Richard Peoples

Thursday 15th October

A SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT by Richard Brett and Pam Jenner
SAYING GOODBYE by Richard Latham
LOOKING BACK by Sandra Birnie
YOU KNOW CAROL, CIARAN'S MUM by James Stedman
AN ABUNDANCE OF CAUTION by Rachael Carnes
DARREN AND LORRAINE by Julia Bolden and Richard McNally

The format was very successful, with minimal technical issues and interesting plays being performed over both evenings. "You Know Carol, Ciaran's Mum" was subsequently developed into an 8-part web series by writer James Stedman.

Zoomologues saw 48 plays being performed in 2020. This might not be the greatest number of plays WRiTEON has ever produced in a single year but it certainly compares favourably with years when we have done multiple projects; including First (or Naked) Stage and MaD *and* a Corpus Playroom Project *and* Scene at the Museum! There were 60 roles to be filled; providing many opportunities for our actors. Two of the great things about Zoomologues were 1) that we started to get great scripts coming in from people well-known to WRiTEON for other skills but not hitherto known to us as writers and 2) they enabled people to join in from further afield, including several previous WRiTEON members and affiliated artists who had moved away from Cambridge. All in all, we are extremely proud of this project and would like to thank Antony Quinn for his technical support, the committee for their endorsement and all our members and our affiliated artists for their creative involvement.

Steve Waters Workshop

We had originally planned to run a writing workshop led by Steve Waters on Saturday 21st March. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus this was cancelled. Thankfully, we were able to rearrange the workshop to run over Zoom on Saturday 19th September. It was entitled "Writing a Play from First Idea to Final Draft". We'd like to thank Antony Quinn for organising the workshop and Steve Waters for running the workshop so professionally.

Trish Rawson

The most devastating impact of the Coronavirus on WRiTEON was the loss of our dear friend and long-serving committee member Trish Rawson, who died in April. In honour of Trish, we have introduced an annual prize, "The Trish Rawson Fabby Award" which will be given to someone (be they writer, actor or backstage crew) that we feel went above and beyond in delivering on one of

the WRiTEON projects that year. This year the award went to Sandra Birnie, for turning her hand to playwriting for the first time and getting four excellent plays performed in our Zoomologues series.

Membership Scheme

The committee took the initiative to revitalise our membership scheme this year, which had been a topic of consideration for many years. After extensive research and much deliberation, we arrived at our new 'More for Less' Membership Scheme.

We reduced the annual price of membership from £20 to £12 (£10 for standing order members) and, for this, members get access to two free workshops, on Zoom and a new Members-Only Facebook Group, as well as the usual access to submission opportunities and discount on other workshops. There is potential to expand this offering further after the pandemic.

Looking Ahead to 2021

Looking ahead to 2021, Richard and Julia will continue to offer further rounds of Zoomologues, Mari and Sultan are looking to organise a First Stage season & Julia is looking to run 60 Sixty Second plays, once it is safe to do so. Richard is planning another collaborative playwriting project, which is in pre-production at this time. We are immensely proud of everything that WRiTEON has achieved and look forward to delivering another exciting year for our members, affiliated artists and audiences.