

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award

Project Title				
All the World's a Stage: Empowering Compositional Creativity, Amplifying Underrepresented Voices, and Breaking Down Barriers to Audience Engagement with New Approaches to Online & Hybrid Musical Theatre				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	University of Nottingham			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	Nottingham Playhouse			
Website URL	https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
<p>The PhD composer will support the Nottingham Playhouse Participation Department, composing/co-creating musical theatre works in partnership with diverse communities, and fostering development of new practices around inclusive co-production and hybrid/online performance to realise their mission 'to tell diverse stories that reflect our city and 'create life-changing experiences for our community'.</p> <p>Research Context</p> <p>Without live, in-person performances through the Covid-19 pandemic, Nottingham Playhouse has had to find ways to share work with audiences online. These new online performance formats have enabled the Playhouse to reach national and international audiences who would not normally be able to attend a performance in Nottingham and/or local audiences who may face barriers to attending/engaging with in-person performances. Online platforms have further enabled new modes of interactivity between artists and audiences before, during, and after performances, including more informal interactions, which can encourage a wider range of audience members to engage.</p> <p>This year, the Nottingham Playhouse also formalised their commitment to effecting representative change in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement by publishing an 'Anti-Racism Action Plan'. As part of this plan, the Playhouse committed 'to ensure that the work [they] present on [their] stages and create in [their] participation reflects the communities that [they] serve'.</p> <p>At this pivotal moment as the Playhouse considers how to bring the positive learnings from online performances into the post-Covid landscape and explores new ways of presenting community stories on stage in inclusive ways to new audiences, the PhD composer-researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate how online and hybrid/interactive musical theatre performance formats can support the Nottingham Playhouse in engaging with and developing diverse audiences • Create new online and hybrid musical theatre works to be presented as part of the Nottingham Playhouse Participation programmes, which amplify underrepresented Nottingham voices • Provide leadership to artists in the Playhouse's 'Amplify' programme and other regional artists/venues in how to adapt their work for inclusive online/hybrid delivery to diverse audiences 				

Research Questions

The student will investigate the following questions:

- 1) How can a composer reanimate historical stories from underrepresented populations in a musical theatre work which resonates with diverse contemporary audiences?
- 2) What are the best methodologies and practices a composer can deploy to respectfully co-create musical theatre with diverse communities?
- 3) How can audience interactivity navigated through the course of a performance via the audience's personal mobile devices activate richer engagement with the artists and content of a musical theatre work?
- 4) What are the most effective modes of hybrid and online musical theatre performance to enable the Nottingham Playhouse (and other similar venues) to engage with new audiences, particularly audiences who have faced/continue to face barriers to attending live performances at cultural venues?
- 5) How can online platforms enable and activate engagement with audiences before, during, and after performances?

Methodology

The project will require the composer-researcher to draw on diverse research methodologies.

The primary research methodology will be practice-based research, which will unfold in an iterative process with work-in-progress tested in workshop sessions with key co-creators, stakeholders, Nottingham Playhouse staff, and supervisors, and then reworked and refined in response to feedback from these sessions.

The researcher will also undertake archival research at Nottingham archives to uncover stories from underrepresented populations to reanimate through musical theatre composition projects.

The researcher will utilise qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to interview and collect feedback from co-creators, stakeholders, and audiences.

Researcher Benefits from Collaborative Context

Close work with the Nottingham Playhouse Participation Department will enrich the PhD student's work on this project and lay the groundwork for future work as the student establishes their career. The Participation Department will support the student in networking/embedding within the community/sector relationships they have cultivated, and the student will benefit from developing musical theatre works in close collaboration with diverse communities, stakeholders, and Nottingham Playhouse staff. In the final year, the student will lead a series of in-person/online workshops for artists/venues on how to adapt work for inclusive online/hybrid delivery to diverse audiences, which will afford the student further opportunities to develop their leadership skills and expand their professional/artistic network.



Supervisory Team

Throughout the 4-year project, the student will receive supervisory support from Martin Berry, Director of Participation at the Nottingham Playhouse, in addition to an expert interdisciplinary team from the University of Nottingham including composer Elizabeth Kelly (Associate Professor in Music Composition/ co-director of Nottingham Forum for Artistic Research), computer scientist Chris Greenhalgh (Professor of Computer Science, co-director of Mixed Reality Lab), and musicologist Hannah Robbins (Assistant Professor in Popular Music, Director of Black Studies).

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

Lead HEI Supervisor:	Dr Elizabeth Kelly, Associate Professor in Music Composition
Lead HEI Supervisor Email:	<i>elizabeth.kelly@nottingham.ac.uk</i>