



**A response from Kabosh to the
Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure Inquiry into
Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities
March 2014**

ABOUT KABOSH

Established in 1994, Kabosh is an independent theatre company resident in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast. We are committed to challenging the notion of what theatre is and where it takes place.

We aim to reinvent the ways in which stories are told, commissioning new writing and devising work for site-specific environments and installation. We strive to create the best environment for performance as well as cultivating original work in radical partnerships with other arts practitioners.

- We create exciting theatre in different types of locations
- We create engaging narrative using local stories and histories to create plays that chart the way Northern Ireland is evolving
- We are committed to providing quality stimulating, entertainment for everybody living in and visiting Northern Ireland
- We believe in the politics of theatre to transform lives
- We animate public spaces
- We initiate projects using artists from a wide range of genres
- We are committed to the development of arts & culture within Northern Ireland and promoting its worth both nationally and internationally
- We are committed to producing cultural tourism product

There are four main strands to our work:

- 1) Major site-specific projects:
 - Kabosh recently staged *Belfast by Moonlight* in St George's Church, High Street, as part of the Belfast Festival @ Queens 2013 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the foundation of Belfast. The production involved a community choir and built on a two community engagement projection on the Shankill Road.
- 2) Cultural Tourism Product:
 - The company recently received funding from CIF and BCC to create immersive digital apps of *Shankill Stories* and *Fall's Road* (based on *The West Awakes*) under a collective portal *Streets of Belfast*. This development of digital product continues to develop new local and international audiences, particularly among young people.
 - For the third year in succession Kabosh worked with NMNI to create unique 1913 animated walking tours of the Folk Museum in Cultra for young people. As part of this project Kabosh provided skills training for existing staff.
- 3) Social Cohesion:
 - In January 2014 Kabosh staged a new play entitled *Those you pass on the street* in partnership with Healing Through Remembering. Looking at conflict resolution it was staged in Skainos, East Belfast; Culturlainn, West Belfast and the Mac, city centre. Plans are underway to revive the production over the coming months in response to a broad range of community invites to maximise access.
 - November/December 2013 Kabosh facilitated a three-week oral archive, script development and performance project in association with NIACRO. Working with

recently released prisoners Kabosh staged and recorded a premiere radio play for international broadcast on the web.

4) International Touring:

- April 2014 Kabosh Artistic Director has been invited to present on the positive role theatre can play in conflict resolution at the respected Salsberg Global Conference.
- As a member of the 5-yr international Intercult *Corners* project <http://cornersofeuropa.org> Kabosh Artistic Director will lead two collaborative projects *In-Between*, a social housing installation and *Built to Contain*, original radio plays scripted and performed by current prisoners. The projects will be staged in European cities of culture 2014-2019.

We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the CAL Committee Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities and would be interested in giving oral evidence.

1) Investigate the accessibility of the arts in Northern Ireland to working class communities and to ascertain the key challenges and barriers to the involvement of those communities in the arts;

Over the past 11 months (March 2013-February 2014) Kabosh has specifically engaged with working-class communities as followed:

The West Awakes

15th – 17th March 2013

Participants (community): 16 – tour guides, venue managers, community writers

Audience: 46

3-day revival of political dramatic walking tour of the **Falls Road**. Originally produced in 2009, Kabosh commissioned 4 playwrights – including 2 community playwrights living in **West Belfast**, to write a 15-20 minute piece about a location on the current political walking tour. Kabosh worked with local tour guides to enhance the current tour with theatre, offering training with this partnership. Tour has been revived for a minimum of two performances each year since 2009.

Inventors Community Engagement programme

April – Sept 2013, Various NI,

Participants: 289

The community engagement project was accessed by **Ballykinler** Group: 9 young men (aged 13-18), 4 full days to develop a pedal powered flying machine and learn drama; **Denmark St, Shankill Rd** – 12 young people, mixed gender (aged 8-10) 6 weeks drama workshops culminated in development of short film; **Antrim** group – 6 young women (aged 13-16) 6 week drama workshops and full, professional supported performance in Kabosh Barn; Young Farmers Group – 250 young people (aged 16-25) gathered in **Cookstown** for a day of drama and circus based on the production.

Shankill Stories

March 2013 – PRESENT (Engagement)

Performances: 9th – 10th July, Shankill Road

Participation: 58

Audience: 30

Kabosh partnered with **the Shankill Womens Centre, the Spectrum centre, Shankill Library,** and the **Shankill Area Social History group (SASH)** to create a social history tour with short theatre pieces along the Shankill Road as part of the July celebrations. Kabosh created an oral archive – 37 individuals took part from across the Shankill Community. 6 workshops were completed, looking at drama, tour guide skills and presenting information in an engaging way. 9 individuals took part in workshops and script was developed in tandem with these sessions. Script sessions completed with playwright and one-to-one sessions with tour guides. 4 x short plays were produced by professional playwright – produced for tour on 9-10th July 2013. Visual artist Lesley Cherry created a “fun day” for children on the Shankill Road, asking them to relate through drawing what the Shankill means to them. A smartphone app is currently in the final stages with The Design Zoo ready to be launched in April 2014. The app features research undertaken by the SASH group during the project. The app will allow locals and visitors alike to discover the fascinating history of the Shankill Road.

It's in the Streets

June 2013, 7 Belfast community venues,
Estimated audience: 137

Kabosh in association with Healing Through Remembering, staged an original drama on the Day of Reflection, June 2013, in ten exterior locations across the Belfast city: **Linenhall Library, City Hall, Skainos Centre, Spectrum Centre, Culturlann and Cornmarket.** Performances were free and fully accessible, performed by local actors. This work is part of Kabosh on-going projects looking at conflict resolution.

Hostel

12th-13th September 2013, An Culturlann Doire & Black Box Belfast
in association with First Housing and UNISON
Audience: 220

Revival of Fionnuala Kennedy's play, *Hostel*, exploring the playwright's experience living in a hostel after the birth of her child. This revival was commissioned by First Housing in association with UNISON as part of Derry City of Culture 2013. Both performances were free and followed by a facilitated discussion. Derry performance was attended by **residents and service users of First Housing in Derry.** The Belfast performance was attended by invited participants of the **Shankill Stories** project. Since its first performance in 2011, *Hostel* has been used at conferences and events for staff and service users, for organisations such as the Simon Community, The Welcome Organisation, Department of Social Development, Rosemont House, Shankill Women's Centre and many more.

Belfast By Moonlight

18th-31st October 2013
Audience: 1,044

A site-specific production staged in the historic **St. George's Church,** High Street, Belfast, as part of the Ulster Bank Belfast festival at Queen's 2013, looking at the 400th anniversary of the foundation of Belfast. Kabosh offered discounted tickets to participants in the *Shankill Stories* project.

Built to Contain

24th November – 12th December
Participants: 10 recently released male prisoners for 3 weeks

Developed from an intensive oral archive period and facilitated discussions a new script was developed, the resulting 20-minute radio play was performed by the **NIACRO** participants and recorded in the abandoned C-wing at Crumlin Rd Gaol. It will be shared on national radio stations and via the web.

Those you Pass on the Street

29th January – 1st February 2014

Audience: 450

A flexible touring production of a new play looking at dealing with the past staged in the **Skainos, CulturLainn** and the MAC. Each performance was free and followed by a facilitated post-show discussion. The main audience were members of marginalised working-class groups currently working with Healing Through Remembering delivery partners.

In addition to each of the accessible projects for individuals and groups, over a 11-month period Kabosh has offered several high-quality short and long-term placements to working class young people as well as free presentations and support sessions. For example:

- 10.04.13: judge at 1st 3rd level performing arts competition in Island Arts Centre – 225 participants
- 16.05.13 2 hr presentation and Q&A with members of PLAYERS
- 15.04 – 17.05: 5 week placement for M. Wozniak on 'Inventors' (production assistant) including funding his attendance at Polish Theatre conference, Dublin 7th May 2013
- 28.06.13: 30 minute advice session with recent theatre graduate Stefan Dunbar on casting and project development
- 11.07.13: advice to S. Carbery re acting funding for her son
- 16.07.13: support interview for J. Ciesielska
- 04.09.13: meeting re Open University project for working class communities
- 12.09.13: 30 mins presentation to 70 Belfast Met ND and HND students for freshers week @ Tower St
- 27.09.13: O. F. Wittke on 2 week placement from 16th Sep – 27th Sep.
- 23-25.10.13: M. McCaughey work placement from Sacred Heart School.
- 27.09-31.10.13: N. Davis 5 week placement
- 13.10 – 10.11.13 I. Katric – 4 week internship
- NIACRO – 9 ex-prisoners for 3 weeks Nov/Dec 2013 – 'Built to Contain'
- 20-23.01.14: J. Watterson – Glenlowler Collegiate school Bangor on placement
- 27-29.02.14 N. Adams - Dromore High School – Work Experience

As indicated there is no static model of community engagement undertaken by kabosh.

Key challenges to effective engagement are sourcing interested community individuals and groups; securing investment to provide subsidised access to Kabosh productions post initial engagement; funding that allows for process rather than focussing on product; and including placements and presentations in quantification of active participation.

2) Examine the outreach activity of our arts venues and bodies with respect to how they make a meaningful contribution to social inclusion within working class communities; including the degree to which they can help tackle particular social issues;

The projects listed above make a meaningful contribution to social inclusion from bringing young people from Ballykindler to Balmoral Show where they collectively experienced a unique social experience post intensive mechanical and empowerment workshops in their own community (*Inventors*); to working with Shankill Area Social History Group to archive stories of their community, train local tourist guides, develop a unique theatrical walking tour and record elements for a digital app thereby establishing a sense of community pride as well as an economic generator (*Shankill Stories*).

Kabosh works in a broad range of artforms visual art, radio production, digital development and theatrical staging in unusual locations; utilising a range of methodology from 3D installation to multi-

generational oral archive to group facilitated sessions to subsidised tickets to name but a few. It is adapted and assessed on an individual project basis.

Both projects produced in collaboration with Healing Through Remembering for Day of Reflection 2013 and Dealing with the Past 2014 directly tackled the sensitive social issue of conflict resolution and allowed for collective informed engagement through facilitated post-show discussions.

3) Identify any examples of good practice in accessibility and outreach work – either within Northern Ireland or elsewhere – which could usefully be replicated by arts venues and bodies here;

The unique 3-week model of operation devised by Kabosh to nurture, develop, script and perform original radio plays for international broadcast with recently-released and current prisoners has been commissioned by Intercult/ACNI/Exodus and will form the core of European Cities of Culture 2014-2019. Post the successful premiere in Belfast February 2014 *Built to Contain* will take place in Slovenia June 2014 and Sweden November 2014. The play explores difficult issues associated with incarceration.

In addition Kabosh is the creator and participant of *In Between*, a multi-media three-week community project exploring social and political impact of high-density living that will tour Europe over the next five years and is staged in collaboration with international artists.

Due to the range of successful models of operation developed and produced by kabosh, the company Artistic Director has been invited to present at the renowned Salsberg Global Seminar April 2014.

4) Make recommendations for improvements in policies, delivery mechanisms and collaboration among key stakeholders which will maximise the potential of our arts venues and bodies to address social inclusion issues in both urban and rural working class communities and across communities in Northern Ireland.

Projects that effectively engage alter from the initial stages of a funding application over the process to the product – often attendance is less than expected, the direction the artistic elements go in differs, outcomes need to be reassessed. If this flexibility is not facilitated then the engagement is more form-based than truthful.

Not all projects are suitable for a community-based engagement element – it should not be forced on all organisation outcome. It would be advantageous for investment in subsidised tickets and travel so that groups and individuals previously worked with can be encouraged to attend other company output.

Offer funding for paid internships and placements within professional arts organisations for interested individuals from disadvantaged communities. Provide investment for local practitioners to visit 2nd level educational establishments in working class communities and give practical examples of how a career in the arts is possible.

Look at how revival of effective projects dealing with pertinent social and political issues can be toured into working-class communities – for example *Those you pass on the street* – this is cost-effective, proven product.

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