Positive Stories For Negative Times

Five Plays For Young People to Perform in Real Life or Remotely
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Robbie Gordon, Sabrina Mahfouz, Jack Nurse, Stef Smith, Chris Thorpe and Bea Webster
Edited by Wonder Fools
Positive Stories for Negative Times

Presented by Wonder Fools in association with Traverse Theatre

Supported by SCVO Wellbeing Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, Foundation Scotland Response Fund, The Brunton, Renfrewshire Leisure and Future Paisley.

Wonder Fools would also like to thank Eilidh Nurse, Gemma Nicol and Lisa Williamson for their hard work in getting this project off the ground, and the Wonder Fools board: Vikki Doig, Dominic Hill, Anne McCluskey, Gary McNair and Nima Sene for their endless encouragement and advice.

Positive Stories for Negative Times was first produced as an online participatory project for Wonder Fools, 26 August 2020 to 31 March 2021.
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ABOUT THE PROJECT

*Positive Stories for Negative Times* is a new national participatory project by Wonder Fools. This innovative and exciting project responds to the lack of physical spaces for young people to participate in creative activities due to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, and instead allows them to come together to make new work online or live in the space, if government guidelines allow.

Wonder Fools have commissioned some of the UK’s most exciting voices to write new plays for young people including Sabrina Mahfouz, Stef Smith, Chris Thorpe, Bea Webster and Robbie Gordon and Jack Nurse. The plays are written specifically to be performed remotely or socially distanced and will be free to participating groups between the ages of eight and twenty-five, from August 2020 to March 2021. Participating groups are sent a handbook of exercises to help explore the play of their choice, and are invited to record and upload their performance to our interactive map which will share and celebrate all the brilliant work from young people across the UK and beyond.

If you are reading this book before 31 March 2021 then you can read all five plays and our handbook at your leisure. If you’d like to perform them then we’d invite you to take part in the project. You can find more information, sign up and see performances from the hundreds of other groups taking part at www.positiviestories.scot.
EDITORS’ NOTE

Positive Stories for Negative Times started life in our living rooms in Spring 2020 during the national lockdown. We wanted to find ways for young people to still be creative and connect with one another during a time when we were all forced to be apart. Over a whirlwind couple of months, thanks to the brilliance of the team around us and the playwrights involved, we managed to pull together a project that we hope fulfils these aims.

We are absolutely delighted to have had the privilege of working with such a brilliant selection of writers who are some of our favourite voices working in the UK today. The biggest ‘pinch me’ moment of our careers so far was when Sabrina Mahfouz, Stef Smith, Chris Thorpe and Bea Webster agreed to take part in this project and we can’t thank them enough. The plays are all incredibly different but equally full of interesting stories, exciting forms and searching questions about this extraordinary moment we are living through.

We imagine, though, that the most excitement we’ll feel about the project hasn’t happened yet. That’ll start in the coming weeks when the interactive website begins to be busy with content and the map becomes populated with all the different pins from Falkirk to Falmouth, from Coatbridge to Cardiff and from who knows where after that. It’ll be a complete buzz to see what everyone comes back with and the positivity, creativity and connection that everyone will hopefully feel from participating. We cannae wait.

Steph, Jack and Robbie aka Wonder Fools

September 2020

www.positivestories.scot
ABOUT WONDER FOOLS

‘Fiercely curious Glasgow-based Wonder Fools company’

The Herald

Wonder Fools are a theatre company that create contemporary new work based on a diverse range of current and historical real-life stories. During our short history, we have sought unknown and forgotten stories lost in the evolving social landscape of Britain that we are able to reshape and make theatre from. From these stories we take theatre productions, performance installations and workshops to people across Scotland and the UK, as well as creating digital work online.

To date we have staged four full productions: McNeill of Tramont: Fastest Man in the World (2014/2015), an autobiographical show performed by retired athlete George McNeill, who in 1972 was the fastest man in the world despite never being allowed to compete in the Olympic or Commonwealth Games; The Coolidge Effect (2016–present), an interactive performance that examines how pornography affects our mental health, relationships and sexual experiences using a blend of storytelling, poetry and science; Lampedusa (2017) by Anders Lustgarten, exploring the acts of human kindness behind the headlines of the migrant crisis and 549: Scots of the Spanish Civil War (2018–2019), telling the true stories of four miners from Prestonpans who volunteered as part of the International Brigade.

Stories to Connect Us is a season of digital work produced throughout 2020 and includes brand new projects (Home Made and The New Normal) and our most excitingly relevant previous productions reimagined and repurposed for now
(The Coolidge Effect and 549: Scots of the Spanish Civil War).
The season is a collection of stories that examine the past, the present and the future in ways that we hope will reveal something about who we are at this moment in time. In contrast to our collective isolation and to counter our shared anxiety, we hope Stories to Connect Us pulls people closer together through the underlying themes of connection, compassion and hope.

wonderfools.org
Twitter: @wonder_fools
Facebook: @wonderfoolsonline
Instagram: @wonder_fools_online

SUPPORT US

Wonder Fools SCIO (SC047673) is a registered charity and arts organisation.

Wonder Fools depends upon the generosity of individuals like you to make our work, on stage and off, happen. For example, Positive Stories for Negative Times could not have happened without the generous and wide-ranging support of organisations, individuals, charities, trade unions and the public.

We would love to run Positive Stories for Negative Times again in the future, hopefully as an annual initiative, and if you find value in the process and you have a little bit of cash to spare a donation it would go a long way to making this happen.

Visit www.wonderfools.org/donate to contribute to our work and other projects similar to this one. Together, with your help, we can continue to take our work to young people and audiences across Scotland and beyond.
WONDER FOOLS TEAM

Robbie Gordon  Co-Founder
Jack Nurse  Co-Founder
Steph Connell  Producer
Gemma Nicol (hidden route)  Participation Associate
Lisa Williamson (hidden route)  Participation Associate
Eilidh Nurse  Assistant Producer
ABOUT TRAVVERSE THEATRE COMPANY

As Scotland’s new writing theatre, the Traverse Theatre is a dynamic centre for performance, experience and discovery. Enabling people across society to access and engage with theatre is our fundamental mission.

Our year-round programme bursts with new stories and live performances that challenge, inform and entertain. We empower artists and audiences to make sense of the world today, providing a safe space to question, learn, empathise and – crucially – encounter different people and experiences. We commission, produce and programme for existing and future audiences to offer new and exciting experiences for everyone, and our partnerships with other theatre companies and festivals enable us to present a wide range of innovative performances.

We are passionate about developing talent and embracing the unexplored, working with the newest and rawest talent – with an emphasis on the Scottish-based – and nurturing it to become the art, artists and performances that can be seen on our stages through a variety of creative learning and literary programmes.

The timely, powerful stories that start life on our stages have global impact, resulting in dozens of tours, productions and translations. We are critically acclaimed and recognised the world over for our originality and artistic risk, which we hope will create some of the most talked-about plays, productions, directors, writers and actors for years to come.

traverse.co.uk
With thanks
The Traverse Theatre extends grateful thanks to all those who generously support our work, including those who prefer their support to remain anonymous.

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The Traverse Theatre is further supported by IASH, the Institute of Advanced Research in the Humanities, at the University of Edinburgh.

Grant Funders
The Traverse is funded by Creative Scotland and The City of Edinburgh Council, with additional support from The Scottish Government Performing Arts Venues Relief Fund.

Traverse Theatre (Scotland) is a Limited Company (Registered Number SC 076037) and Scottish Charity (Registered Number SC 002368) with its Registered Office at 10 Cambridge Street, Edinburgh, Scotland, EH1 2ED.

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CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

CORE TEAM

Robbie Gordon – Project Lead and Playwright

Robbie is a graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and co-founder of Wonder Fools.

His work is socially engaged, embedded in communities and always strives to start a conversation. He currently works as the Associate Director of Creative Learning at the Gaiety Theatre, the Creative Producer for Class Act at the Traverse Theatre and the director of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Young Company.

Selected credits: writer, performer and movement director of 549: Scots of the Spanish Civil War (Wonder Fools); writer and performer of The Coolidge Effect (Wonder Fools); writer and director of McNeill of Tranent: Fastest Man in the World (Wonder Fools); actor in Charlie Sonata (Royal Lyceum Theatre); director of Open Your Lugs (Ayr Gaiety); associate director of Square Go (Francesca Moody Productions); workshop leader and sand artist on Danny Boyle’s Pages of the Sea (National Theatre of Scotland); research assistant on Locker Room Talk (Traverse Theatre); and assistant director on Graham McLaren’s Dream On! (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland/BBC Symphony Orchestra).

www.robbiegordon.org

Jack Nurse – Project Lead and Playwright

Jack is a director and theatre-maker from Dumfries and Galloway and is co-founder of Wonder Fools.

Training: Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the National Theatre Studio Directors’ Course.

As Director: 549: Scots of the Spanish Civil War, Home Made, McNeill of Tranent, The Coolidge Effect (Wonder Fools); Larchview (National Theatre of Scotland); The Lost Elves
(Citizens Theatre/Royal Conservatoire of Scotland); 
*Lampedusa* (Citizens Theatre); *The Mack* (Play, Pie, Pint/Traverse Theatre).

As Associate/Resident Director: *Red Dust Road* (National Theatre of Scotland/HOME); *The Broons* (Sell A Door); *Dr Dolittle* (Music & Lyrics).

As Assistant Director: *Oresteia: This Restless House* (Citizens Theatre/National Theatre of Scotland); *Blackbird* (Citizens Theatre); *The Winter’s Tale* (Royal Lyceum); *Hay Fever* (Royal Lyceum/Citizens Theatre).

www.jacknurse.com

**Steph Connell – Producer**

Steph has produced for Wonder Fools since 2018 having produced *Stories to Connect Us, 549: Scots of the Spanish Civil War* and *Lampedusa*. She is also Producer of ThickSkin, credits include *Petrichor, How Not To Drown, AWOL, Chalk Farm* and as Assistant Producer for *The Static*. Steph was Stage One Producer at the Citizens Theatre in 2017. Other producing credits include *No Way Back* (Frantic Assembly); *Leaper – A Fish Tale* and *Finding Victoria* (Tucked In); *Full Stop, Playground Victories* (Light The Fuse/Scribbled Thought) and *Superhero Snail Boy* (Scribbled Thought). Steph has also worked for Artichoke, National Theatre of Scotland, Greenwich and Docklands International Festival, National Centre for Circus Arts and is currently Project Coordinator at the Tron Theatre.

www.stephconnell.co.uk

**Gemma Nicol – Participation Associate**

Gemma is co-Artistic Director of Dundee-based theatre company **hidden route** who work with young people and partners from Scotland and beyond to create bold work in unexpected places driven by curiosity and collaboration. She
is also a Performing Arts Lecturer at Dundee and Angus College.

After graduating from London’s Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, she went on to work as Education Officer in Scotland’s largest theatre-based Creative Learning department at Dundee Rep Theatre. As a freelance director, producer and facilitator she worked with organisations including: National Theatre of Scotland; Traverse Theatre; Imaginate; Youth Theatre Arts Scotland; MacRobert and Edinburgh’s Festival Theatre. Gemma returned to Dundee Rep in 2012 where she became Head of Rep Engage. Here, she managed, directed and delivered on a diverse range of productions and projects with partners ranging from local community groups to national producing theatres such as York Theatre Royal, Theatre Royal Plymouth, Leeds Playhouse and the RSC.

Lisa Williamson – Participation Associate

Lisa is co-Artistic Director of Dundee-based theatre company hidden route.

With a degree in Contemporary Theatre and Performance, Lisa has lead, devised and directed numerous youth theatre productions including original devised performances, site specific theatre and pieces of new writing. Lisa has experience co-ordinating and producing national youth theatre festivals, drama conferences and developing partnerships with organisations including Scottish Youth Theatre, Derby Theatre and Theatre Royal Plymouth.

Lisa was Learning and Engagement Manager at Youth Theatre Arts Scotland where amongst other projects she developed and designed professional development opportunities for youth theatre leaders across the country. Prior to this she was Participation and Young Artists Associate at Dundee Rep Theatre’s renowned Engage department where she focused on developing partnerships
and projects to nurture young artists in the North East of Scotland.

**Eilidh Nurse – Assistant Producer**

Eilidh graduated from the University of Stirling in 2018 with a First Class Joint BA Hons in English Literature and Film/Media. She has worked with organisations and festivals such as the Wigtown Book Festival, the National Youth Theatre, the National Student Drama Festival, the Hay Festival, the CatStrand Arts Centre and the Ayr Gaiety Theatre. Before joining the Wonder Fools team she was Assistant Producer at the Watermill Theatre, Newbury, and worked closely with the Artistic Director on programming and producing their variety of shows.

As a playwright, Eilidh has been a member of the Traverse Theatre Young Writers Group and the HighTide Playwright’s Academy. She was a finalist for the 2018 Masterclass Pitch Your Play Competition at Theatre Royal Haymarket and in early 2019 was mentored by award-winning playwright Frances Poet after being selected as a Wigtown Book Festival Regional Writer’s Awardee. In September 2019, she was one of three winners of the Rose Theatre Kingston’s New Writing Festival and received a rehearsed reading at the Rose with a cast of professional actors, directed by Fay Lomas. Since then she has been longlisted for EMERGE 2020 (Flux Theatre/Arcola), shortlisted for Catalyst 2020 (North Wall, Oxford), longlisted for Pint-Sized 2020 (Bunker) and was ranked in the top 10 per cent out of 1,500 submissions for the 2020 Verity Bargate Award (Soho Theatre). Eilidh was recently longlisted for the inaugural Women’s Prize for Playwriting (Paines Plough/Ellie Keel Productions), making the final seventy out of 1,169 submissions.
PLAYWRIGHTS

Bea Webster

Bea trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (BA performance in British Sign Language and English)

Recent writing credits include Staging Our Futures Project (Little Cog Theatre); Squeezy Yoghurt (National Theatre of Scotland’s Scenes for Survival).

Bea’s poem, Long Lost Lover, about Thailand, her birthplace, was published in both BSL and English. She also wrote and performed in the BBC Social’s How Not To Be D*cks To Deaf People’. She is one of the Playwright Studio Scotland’s mentored playwrights for 2020.

She was nominated Best Actress in a Play at The Stage Debut Awards 2019 for her role of Kattrin in Mother Courage. Theatre credits include The Winter’s Tale (Royal Shakespeare Company); Peeling (Taking Flight Theatre Company); Mother Courage and Her Children (Red Ladder Theatre Company).

Chris Thorpe

Chris is a writer and performer from Manchester. He is currently working with China Plate touring his solo piece Status internationally and developing the final show in his trilogy in collaboration with Rachel Chavkin. He is Associate Artist at the Royal Exchange, Manchester – work for them includes There Has Possibly Been An Incident and The Mysteries, and work with their community projects and Young Company. Other theatre work includes Victory Condition and The Milk of Human Kindness for the Royal Court, as well as an upcoming Royal Court/Methuen commission focusing on the climate crisis and the Royal Court/FT film What Do You Want Me To Say? and several shows for the Unicorn Theatre including a new version of Beowulf.