



**bamboozle**

creating possibilities for disabled children

**2020**

**What we've done, what we've  
learnt and what we're doing next**





## Introduction

Of course 2020 will become synonymous the world over for one thing – Coronavirus Covid-19 and this certainly couldn't be more true than for Bamboozle. As the year began and we heard the reports coming from China, we grew concerned for our friends and partners at Shanghai Children's Art Theatre. While worrying about what the impact might be for our colleagues at the theatre and for the theatre itself, we also wondered what it would mean for our planned Shanghai residency in the spring. But that was four months off – we had lots to do before then!

Our new production, *Makara and the Mountain Dragon*, was on tour – taking an epic fantasy story, complete with full scale dragon, right into school halls. (Watch a short video [here](#)). We were delighted by the feedback we received from the tour:

- 'Students were engaged in visual, tactile and auditory sensations. Staff felt emotional watching the fantastic interactions with the Bamboozle company. Wonderful to see.'
- 'I love that pupils' individual responses are recognised and reflected back. I think all staff learn a lot too, by watching the pupils and stepping back and watching the respectful way actors interacted.'

Meanwhile, we were creating a new show for audiences on the autistic spectrum: *Rain Rain*. We were really pleased that we were able to fulfil two weeks of touring for our new show, before the increase in covid-cases in the UK, meant we took the sad decision to close the tour a week early. We were really disappointed that we could not complete the tour, since we had been receiving powerful feedback about the show's impact:

- 'A triumph! As an organisation, we are always thinking deeply about how to empower pupils, who may struggle to have a 'voice' and exercise control over their lives. Today was the epitome of pupil-driven performance at its very best... There were some inspiring responses from pupils, several of whom can be v. challenging to engage.'





## Responding to Covid-19: What we've done

Once it became clear that we were going to have to find a way to creatively respond to Covid, in order to continue to reach our audience, we started to experiment with new approaches. Since the start of the pandemic, we have piloted a range of new creative experiences, which maintain artistic ambition, whilst responding to the need to work in a 'Covid-safe' way. This has included:

- Purely digital resources – digital workshops with a mix of music, narrative and ideas for creative interaction for families to facilitate themselves.
- 'Live digital experiences' – live concerts delivered via Zoom to small audiences, to enable individual attention and interaction with all participants.
- Live 'in person' experiences – an outdoor version of our show *Down to Earth* and *Front of House* – a project taking a music festival set straight to people's front doors. Watch a short film of *Down to Earth Outdoors* [here](#)

As well as enabling us to test new creative approaches, the pilots allowed us to undertake some important research to understand what our audience have been facing and what access to creative experiences means for them right now. Responding to this learning forms the basis of our plans for 2021.







# What we've learnt

1: The pandemic is yet another barrier to learning disabled audiences' access to the arts, but there is a profound desire from our audience to find ways to re-engage.

A majority of our audience are not being reached at all: 62% haven't been able to access any similar activity recently.

Many have been shielding for months and a significant proportion continue to do so, meaning that most reopened cultural activity remains inaccessible for them:

- 'As we continue to shield our daughter this really brightened this difficult time. So special that it was just for us.'

Despite the extra anxieties and challenges which covid presents, both families and schools are really craving creative experiences. They understand and value what this can unlock for their children and young people:

- 'It was something extremely special for Alice as she has been shielding. It was a way of keeping her connected to the things she loves through this tricky time.'
- 'Our students really enjoy accessing the community but as you can imagine this is really restricted for them at the moment, so we would love to plan something special for them.'
- 'They have missed so much of our enrichment programs.'





Image: *Front of House*. Photographed by Matt Robinson

## What we've learnt

2: Live is key and in person is best, but there remains uncertainty about accessing events indoors

When asking audience members who accessed a range of our pilot activity what worked best, they clearly told us that live, in person experiences were the most effective way of creating engaging creative experiences. Most found these experiences 'fully successful'. In the middle were live-digital experiences, with roughly a 60:40 split between those who found them fully successful and those who found them partially successful. Purely digital experiences without a live element had not proven to be as successful. The feedback has been consistent from families and schools:

- 'This was a totally new experience, and so so much appreciated.....having spent months at home shielding Amelia, scared to take her anywhere except for the odd walk . We have watched a lot of films, tv, you tube, done lots and lots of craft activities and participated in numerous interactive zoom sessions. The zoom sessions are great, but Amelia's attention was grasped so much more by the performance in person.....her face lit up, she was vocalising her joy and excitement.'
- 'Our perspective is that the pupils that will most benefit from the incredible work Bamboozle does, would not receive the same impact from a virtual performance. We are very happy to delay the performance until we can do it face to face.'

While our audience is keen to return to in person events, they are more split about whether they feel confident to attend events indoors: 100% would like live outdoor experiences at their own homes; 85% would like live experiences at other outdoor venues; 62% are interested in live digital experiences; 54% would be interested in live experiences in covid-safe venue; 46% are interested in experiences with no live element.



## What we've learnt

3: What we're doing is important and it's working. It's valued by audiences who tell us that it's having a positive impact on their quality of life

Of those who have been able to access other creative activities recently, 100% told us that they found their Bamboozle experience more engaging than the other activity they had accessed. They tell us that what we're offering is unique, that it's bringing joy, making them happy, making them feel more connected to others and enabling opportunities for creative expression. It's also benefitting their wider community:

- 'Unique, uplifting and entertaining. I think the way things were adapted was spot on and despite the social distancing was fully engaging.'
- 'Ingenious, refreshing, uplifting. Being outdoors adds a lovely extra dimension, I think it's an added quality rather than a compromise'
- 'A lovely experience to bring us together in such strange times. Safe, inclusive and such a pleasure. Thank you''.
- 'Bamboozle brought a ray of sunshine into our garden on a grey and drizzly day. They sang beautifully and interacted with our son Freddie and the rest of the family. Everyone agreed that Bamboozle's visit had cheered them up and made them feel happier. Thank you so much Bamboozle.'
- 'It was nice for us to be able to share it with others, it feels like you are sharing the joy.'
- 'Poppy absolutely loved the performance, which was truly unique and something she hadn't experienced before. It gave her the chance to express herself and join in at her pace.'
- 'My 94 year old wheelchair bound neighbour sat in his doorway and absolutely loved it. It made his day and helped him to feel less housebound.'





## What we're doing next

Guided by the responses of those who have taken part in our pilot activities during 2020, we have a full year of activity planned for 2021, here's a sneak peak at the first 6 months...

- During the winter we'll be doing more live-online music concerts to keep us all going through the colder months.
- In the spring we'll develop more Front of House performances and take these directly to learning disabled children's homes and to Special Schools.
- We'll also develop a new epic production to take to schools – continuing our journey into the world of dragons, we'll create a production which will take place outdoors, around Special School grounds.
- At Easter we'll revive our outdoor production of *Down to Earth*, which families with children with profound and multiple learning disabilities will be able to enjoy in the grounds of Leicester's Belgrave Hall.
- We'll also pilot a new creative offer for families with children on the autistic spectrum: *Bamboozle Backyard*, this will become a regular offer at Rowley Field's Allotments throughout the summer.
- In the summer *Down to Earth* and *Bamboozle Backyard* will both visit the Timber Festival in the National Forest, where we'll welcome families with disabled children to the festival, with free tickets from the organisers – Wild Rumpus.

## Sounds exciting, how can I help?

We've been extremely grateful for the continuing support which we have received throughout this difficult time from so many places. First and foremost to the families who have trusted us to take part in our pilots. We've also been humbled by individuals who have continued to make regular donations, who have thought of us in making dedications to loved ones and have asked people to donate to us instead of giving a birthday gift. We're very grateful to our funders, who have been understanding of our needs as we adapt in these unprecedented times. We must recognise in particular the support from Arts Council England, which has been particularly vital in keeping us going.

While this support has been extremely valuable, like so many charities we have still seen a hit on our finances. For example, the forced cancellation of our annual gala and charity auction meant roughly £7K of vital income to invest in our programme was not available to us.

We're a resilient organisation and are confident of our ability to deliver on our plans. We also recognize that many who would like to help us, simply can't at the moment. But for those who are excited by our plans and able to offer support, here's some ways you can help us to extend our reach even further:

- Set up a regular donation: being able to anticipate regular monthly donations has made such a difference to our ability to plan with confidence.
- Make a one off donation, or set up a fundraiser: we know that not everyone is able to give regularly, we're really grateful to people who have thought of us with one-off gifts or who have got creative and found ways to fundraise safely at this time, on our behalf.
- Spread the word: if you know someone who might be interested in what we do, then tell them about us, you can share this document as an introduction. We're really happy to speak to people if they'd like to find out more. If you would have come to our gala, then don't forget to let your guests know about what we've been up to.

Regular and one off donations can be set up on our [Virgin Money Giving page](#), or contact us via [info@bamboozletheatre.co.uk](mailto:info@bamboozletheatre.co.uk) for alternative ways to give.



Image: *Front of House*. Photographed by Matt Robinson





Image: *Front of House*. Photographed by Matt Robinson

## Thank yous

There are too many people who have supported us to name everyone, but we wanted to mention the following in particular:

**Bamboozle Families:** We're extremely grateful to all of the families who have put their trust in us and taken part in our pilots. Thank you for participating, for taking the time to give us feedback and for letting us capture these moments on film.

**Bamboozle Artists:** In what has been an extremely challenging year for all artists and freelance creative practitioners, we couldn't be more grateful for the many artists who have worked with us this year. Thank you for your talent, skill and willingness to experiment. Thank you for being understanding and flexible as we have tried to find a way through.

**Bamboozle Funders:** Funding from **Arts Council England** has given us vital surety from which to navigate otherwise uncertain waters. Their understanding and flexibility has been invaluable. We are also very grateful to the following funders who have continued to support our family work: **The Henry Smith Charity, Children in Need, The National Lottery Community Fund, Leicestershire County Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, Sir Andrew Martin Trust, The Hearth Foundation.**

And to the **Garfield Weston** and **Foyle Foundations** for funding our touring productions at the start of the year.