

Nick Capaldi
Chief Executive
Arts Council Wales

22 November 2018

Dear Nick,

National Theatre Wales

Thank you for your letter of 30 October and for providing the further information requested.

You will be aware of the open letter to Clive Jones, Chair of National Theatre Wales, signed by numerous signatories, expressing discontent at aspects of the theatre's performance.

For information, I attach to this letter the correspondence I have received on this issue as Chair of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee – a letter from Adam Somerset of Theatre-Wales, and the resulting response from National Theatre Wales.

It is not the Committee's role to seek to influence the artistic decisions and direction of individual arts organisations in Wales. However, National Theatre Wales is a portfolio organisation of the Arts Council of Wales and I would be grateful for your views on the attached correspondence and any information on the background to the issues raised that would help the Committee gain a fuller understanding of those issues, including (but not limited to):

1. The amount of funding National Theatre Wales receives from the Arts Council of Wales; and
2. Information on the productions planned for the next 12 months.

Clearly, it is a concern that such a dispute is occurring within the public domain and that so many of those within the sector have expressed such negativity toward one of our premier arts institutions. It would be very helpful if you could also indicate what steps the ACW is taking to help bring the two sides of this dispute together.

In addition to this correspondence I would be more than happy to meet with you, should you wish to discuss the matter in person.

Thank you in advance for providing this information.

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu

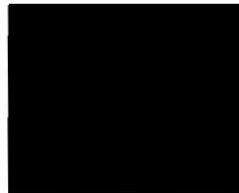
National Assembly for Wales
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Your sincerely,

Bethan Sayed.

Bethan Sayed
Chair

Bethan Sayed AM
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA



November 2nd 2018



Dear Ms Sayed



Subsidised Theatre in Wales

I am the author for Theatre Wales of 869 reviews and articles on theatre and performance. In December each year I write summary articles of our year in theatre. Next month these articles will include the "National Theatre of Wales."

I use inverted commas because these words have meaning and their meaning has been stretched so far as to cease to apply to this company. It stands awkwardly alongside National Opera, Theatr Genedlaethol and National Dance, all admirable and non-contentious representatives of Wales. The company's display across the media of the United Kingdom this season has brought Wales into discredit.

You will be aware of the state of relations between the company and every significant dramatist of Wales, endorsed by the Writers Guild and Equity. Their lack of confidence is principally focused on the programme. The company operates a unique import model among designated national theatres, whereby a large proportion of Wales' public funding is spent on companies, writers and actors from elsewhere.

The weight of protest has been met with silence from the Chair and Board, evasion and distraction the hallmark of other response. However, a second issue also prevails and has been downplayed. The view of the audience member is not that of professional practitioners. The net impact on the theatre ecology is to deprive audiences in Wales of theatre. No numbers are released in the public domain- the policy in Scotland is very different. The sum required to subsidise each audience member may be surmised as the world's highest. The company has now embarked on a sabbatical from theatre for a period known only to itself.

This has an opportunity cost for our theatre of £4000 a day. At the same time tours from companies of a good heritage, who wish to perform to Wales, are being turned down. I do not believe this to be the intended cultural policy of the Government of Wales. The companies who are being terminated have lost heart which gives this issue an immediacy.

I would request the Committee to undertake the actions that are called for. In my own view an open session with Chair and Chief Executive has an urgency to it.

Yours Sincerely

Adam Somerset

ADAM SOMERSET

Theatre-Wales

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Tuesday, 13 November 2018

Bethan Sayed AM
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 INA

Dear Ms Sayed,

We are aware of a letter sent to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee on 2 November by Mr Adam Somerset, raising concerns about National Theatre Wales' work, and that the Committee will discuss this letter at your next meeting tomorrow (14 November).

Before then, I'd like to take this opportunity to set the record straight on some of the allegations made in the letter:

"You will be aware of the state of relations between the company and every significant dramatist of Wales, endorsed by the Writers Guild and Equity"

Since the publication of the writers' letter, NTW and members of our board have met with the signatories twice and offers have been made to meet with other artists. Furthermore, NTW will host a series of meetings and creative exchanges as part of its next, three-year strategic review and ongoing dialogue with artists. The company will also seek the view of audiences as we continue to plan for 2020, our 10th birthday year. For the record, we have had many messages of support from other, equally significant Welsh writers. The signatories are not "every significant dramatist of Wales".

"The company operates a unique import model among designated national theatres, whereby a large proportion of Wales' public funding is spent on companies, writers and actors from elsewhere."

Every NTW show is bespoke. All of it is new and all of it is made in Wales. None are 'imported'. Since our inception, 79% of our lead artists have been Welsh or Wales-based. However, we believe that there's room for visiting artists to collaborate with us too, for example, our outdoor spectacular Roald Dahl's City of the Unexpected (the biggest arts event ever staged in Wales) wouldn't have happened without an international director experienced in staging Olympic-sized events. Finally, we have a Wales-first casting policy which, in the interests of transparency, can be found on our website. However, in seeking to reflect the rich cultural diversity of Wales and in accordance with its stated aims on diversity, the company maintains the right to cast further afield if necessary to fulfil its artistic ambition.

"The weight of protest has been met with silence from the Chair and Board."

This is demonstrably not true. Since the writers' open letter was published in September, the Chair, Board and Executive staff have organised and attended two meetings with the writers and invited actors to a similar meeting, posted two blog posts and several statements, given many media interviews and committed to staging an artistic event in Jan 2019 to open the conversation further.

"The net impact on the theatre ecology is to deprive audiences in Wales of theatre. No numbers are released in the public domain- the policy in Scotland is very different."

In its very first Strategic Plan, NTW's vision stated it would seek to 'connect with Welsh audiences and make world-class theatre more accessible, especially to those who currently do not attend mainstream theatre'. Engaging non-attenders who may not feel the theatre is for them comes with challenges, particularly when presenting work across the nation rather than building audiences in one location. However, we are immensely proud of the new audiences we attract and report these figures to the Arts Council of Wales on an annual basis. We balance work to attract specific audiences - for example the Asian community of South Wales with our production Sisters, with free large-scale events for all including The Passion and City of the Unexpected. We amplify the live experience to reach a wider audience via digital and broadcast opportunities and we balance the rural with the urban.

"The sum required to subsidise each audience member may be surmised as the world's highest."

This is an offensive exaggeration. The company's work is not solely centered on productions and its Collaboration and Creative Development activities connect with artists and communities year-round. NTW operates with a lean core staff in order to ensure that as much of its subsidy as possible results in benefit to the public it serves and this encapsulates a wide range of participants. The company's impact cannot be reduced to audience figures alone.

'The company has now embarked on a sabbatical from theatre for a period known only to itself.'

If Mr Somerset is referring to the writers' assertion that some of our recent work does not constitute theatre, we are very proud of our NHS70 Festival this year, a programme of work performed across all seven health boards, using seven artforms, including live comedy, song and original new plays. We believe passionately that there is no single definition of theatre - it evolves constantly, and we reserve the right to experiment with the form.

If, however, Mr Somerset is implying that we have 'gone dark', this is not true. We have publicly stated that we'll announce our next season later this month. In the meantime, we will be hosting many events including a Performance Party in Pembrokeshire and Wrexham as part of a four-year project of embedded community work in both locations.

We have created 15 productions in 2018. It is common for theatre companies to take a breath between one season and the next - National Theatre Scotland's next show isn't until April 2019, for example. And the pause we're taking now, after closing our 2018 season, is absolutely in keeping with our previous schedules.

I am aware that this is a far more complex conversation than can be well served by letter and I welcome any opportunity to discuss our work and its impact across Wales. So, should the Committee wish to invite me to answer any questions at your next meeting, please don't hesitate to ask - I will gladly do so.

Yours sincerely,

Kully Thiarai
Artistic Director & Chief Executive
National Theatre Wales