

## Theatre503: the story of our year

This year has seen the culmination of a vision, first outlined by Lisa Spirling and Andrew Shepherd in the first years of their tenure at Theatre503, which will radically transform our venue and the support of early career playwrights from around the nation and world beyond.

In one of the darkest years in theatre:

- We created a **global online writers' programme** for early career writers
- We enabled a seismic transformation of our business and programming model leading to the **elimination of hire fees** and a bold new approach to get ins, technical rehearsals and previews.
- We have introduced a **new livestreaming model, a paid trainee producer scheme** and a **new investment fund** to open up new sources of funding.
- We also re-opened our theatre in the Autumn with **503Resets**, followed by the critically acclaimed **Foxes** and Offie nominated **Milk and Gall**
- We livestreamed our Christmas show **to over 10,000 schoolchildren in Wandsworth for free.**



We also secured our long term future by winning the bid for a new building which will house the 503Studio at Nine Elms, including a 99 year lease at peppercorn rent and £250k fit out contribution and a commitment to make our current Latchmere home physically accessible as the second phase of our capital development, currently planned for the end of 2023. It will be a state of the art centre of international playwriting excellence; a space for the local community to gather, share their stories and explore their creativity and a bridge to our Latchmere theatre space. The 503Studio at Nine Elms will be **the most significant investment in the new writing ecology in a generation.**

Our new **503Studio: Online Writers Programme**, which offers open access courses, masterclasses, open talks and how to sessions:

- The first iteration at the end of last year, sold out within a matter of days, and featured courses and classes from the likes of Simon Stephens, Jasmine Lee Jones, as well as 503alumni including Anna Jordan and Sam Potter.
- We have also committed **25% of places being offered for free by our Share the Drama Scheme**
- Our Spring 2021 version sold out even faster, as did the Summer and Autumn 2021 iterations. Such is the success of the programme, that writers are engaging from all over the country and world, and some courses have waiting lists for up to five years.
- As well as a direct route to all Theatre503's other writer development, it has created a new income stream to support the development of the literary department as we prepare for a transformational move to our new Studio space.
- To date over **1,000 aspiring writers** have taken part in the 503Studio: Online Writers Programme

In March 2021, Theatre503's Board agreed to a radical transformation of our business model, effectively eliminating the charging of hire fees to any incoming company seeking to stage a production in our venue. It has been a long-held ambition of the two directors, as Lisa outlined in her recent Big Interview in The Stage with Lyn Gardner arguing:

*"The industry is broken. Essentially, it's a pyramid scheme that for years has been propped up by young talent coming in at the bottom and working for nothing and paying hire fees. It's wrong and something had to change"*

In the same meeting it was also agreed to evolve their long established trainee producer scheme, from a six month voluntary placement to a permanent year long paid bursary scheme for two early career producers leading to an unprecedented **165 applications** this summer.

We celebrated the transfer of Yasmin Joseph's award winning **J'Ouvert** into the West End thanks to Sonia Friedman Productions and filmed by BBC Arts. Fellow 503Five alumnus and double Olivier Award winner Jon Brittain's cult classic, **Maggie Thatcher Queen of Soho**, also made its West End debut, eight years after premiering at 503.

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**Theatre503 to eliminate artist hire fees as it unveils new season**

PRODUCTION NEWS JUL 29, 2021 BY GIVERNY MASSO

Public House & Garden **THEATRE 503**

theatre503.jpg

Theatre503 in London is to reopen for live performance in September for the first time since the pandemic began, with a new model in which artists will no longer be charged hire fees.

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After successfully receiving all three rounds of Cultural Recovery Funds, we opened our doors in the Autumn with 503Resets, offering a free space to seven emerging companies and playwrights to find their feet again after the pandemic. The companies were chosen from **94 submissions** and played to **75% capacity audiences**. **Foxes** by Dexter Flanders opened to outstanding reviews in October, before sadly being cancelled for the final 10 days of the run due to Covid-19. The production transferred to Theatre Peckham. It was streamed as part of our new 503Live! series, committing to widening access to Theatre503's work by streaming live performances of our longer runs, in partnership with Chocolate Films, a local social enterprise.

In October 2021 Theatre503 won the **London Pub Theatre of the Year** at the London Pub Theatre Awards.



**Milk and Gall** directed by Lisa Spirling, has launched a glorious new voice. *"Mathilde Dratwa is the real deal"* (Jesse Thompson, Evening Standard) and her *"impressive debut is a hoot"* according to Nikita Karia's four star review in The Stage. With a company led by MyAnna Buring, the play – a finalist in the 2018 Theatre503 International Playwriting Award, chosen out of 2055 scripts sent in from 49 countries – has concluded Theatre503's relaunch with a bang

and ends one of its most outstanding years to date, fulfilling the promise of a vision set out five years ago and a bold statement of intent for the future of the venue and the new writing ecology.

Our 503 Panto – Snow White by Lucy Wilson – is playing out 2021. A brilliant cast of four bring to life a 503 spin on the classic tale. As well as in person run, which is being curtailed somewhat by Covid, we also continued our offer of streaming the show to schoolchildren in Wandsworth for free, as well as adult care homes and those who are too vulnerable to come to our space right now.

And finally we capped an extraordinary year by being nominated for Fringe Theatre of the Year in the 2022 Stage Awards, for the first time in our history.

*"It's a reminder that teeny, tiny theatres nestling above London pubs can often still be the place to hear thrilling new voices first. The return of venues like Theatre503, who punch above their weight and nurture talent, should be celebrated as much as the West End"* – **Evening Standard**