

MUSIC. THEATRE. WALES.

Strategic Equalities Plan

07.12.22

At Music Theatre Wales we are committed to achieving greater equality as an organisation and as an employer, and we aim to ensure that no one receives less favourable treatment as a consequence of having a protected characteristic. We believe that this is a matter of social justice and human rights, and that quotas don't help to effect change unless cultures change within organisations. And change needs to happen throughout our organisation – in the work we make and the people who make it; the people we reach; the board of trustees and our staff.

Our mission is to present opera as a dynamic and contemporary artform that addresses the present and does not simply rely on the repertoire and the practices of the past. We want to remove the structural and social barriers that have prevented many artists from working in opera, especially as creators of new work. Our mission going forward is to work with artists who have been ignored or excluded from opera to create work that speaks to contemporary society, and which engages a new audience. Our belief is that unless we work with artists who will bring new stories and a different approach to music, theatre and performance that might come from different cultural backgrounds, then opera will fail to become the dynamic contemporary form it so clearly has the capacity to be.

We want the long-term impact of this Plan to bring about real change to the diversity of our company – the people we employ and the Trustees, the artists we work with, the work we make and the audience we attract. We believe that as a small company with a strong artistic reputation, working in a sector which currently holds considerable power, we can influence those around us and support change beyond MTFW. We are striving to engender much wider access and much greater diversity in the making of opera and in those who chose to access it.

This Strategic Equality Plan demonstrates Music Theatre Wales's commitment to meeting the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and supports the seven well-being goals of the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Company has a separate Welsh Language Policy which is signed off by the board annually.

Our Plan

Our Board

We currently have nine Trustees, 4 women (one of whom is also Chair) and five men. We have two Global Majority Trustees, LGBT+ representation, but no one with a disability. The age range is from early 30s–70s.

We plan to develop the diversity of our Board to levels which matches the population breakdown of Wales at a minimum. We will strive to maintain gender balance and we aim to ensure that, at all times, at least two members of the Board are Welsh speakers.

Action: *Board Development and Diversification has been an agenda item at every Board meeting for the past year and the Board are fully committed to hearing from and being guided by a diverse range of perspectives. As a result, we will invite a guest speaker with a protected characteristic to speak at future Board meetings on a regular basis, to present their lived experience of their own protected characteristic(s) to offer an insight into their lives and indicate the ways in which we should change. The first speaker will attend a meeting before the end of 2022.*

Action: *Before the end of 2022, we will appoint a Diversity Champion and set up a Equalities Advisory Group for the Board. We are aware that not everyone has the time or capacity to volunteer as a Board member and yet we need their insight and advice. Ideally, we want the artists we work*

with, and especially the Global Majority artists we are working with, to inform how the company should develop. We are therefore looking at options to pay people for the time required to participate in this group, which would not become a sub-committee of the Board but would include representation from the Board and would report directly to it.

Action: To achieve greater diversity, we have been engaging with a wide range of organisations and campaigns which exist to ensure that the arts sector plays a vital role in creating a more equitable society. We need to build on this work, including active consideration of all nine protected characteristics and ensuring we are never excluding anyone for reasons of age, disability, race, belief, sex, gender or pregnancy. Our New Directions programme is bringing us into contact with global majority artists and we are developing new local and international networks for those artists. We hope this will bring greater interest in our work and engender more support from communities with whom we have had no contact in the past.

Action: We are developing a regular training pattern for our Board which started with subconscious bias training in December 2021.

Our workforce

We work with a minimal staff team of three employees (one full-time, two part-time) and one freelancer who leads on the artistic and producing side of New Directions. This makes a central team of four: one male and three female. We have one disabled member of staff and one is Black.

In addition, we have worked with two freelance Press Consultants in the past year, both women – one Black and based in London, and one Welsh speaker.

With our programme for young creative people, Future Directions, we are working to achieve new levels of diversity, amongst the staff as well as the young participants. Future Directions is led by 4 freelance artists: two women and two men. Of the four, one is black, one is gay, one speaks Welsh and one is a Welsh learner. 9 Young People (aged 15–24) have become members of MTW's Young Company so far through Future Directions and will play an important part in influencing MTW's current and future work. Of the current 9 Young Company Members: four are female, 3 are male (including one transgender male), two identify as non-binary; four are neuro-diverse and/or have learning needs related to genetic differences. We have been working with partner organisations to achieve this level of diversity.

Our recent touring production, *Violet*, by Tom Coult and Alice Birch, was directed and designed by three women, two of whom are Global Majority, with electronic sound created by a global majority female composer.

Our future production, working title *House of Jollof Opera* (part of our New Directions programme), will be written and directed by two global majority Welsh artists, and will be a co-production with Fio Theatre, a Global Majority led company. It may also include English, Welsh and Yoruba languages.

Taking advice from an external body, our recent recruitment process for Music Creators for our Future Directions programme has been delivered in a new way with an aim to maximise openness and accessibility to the widest range of artists: An open call using as many social media platforms as possible and engaging with other networks, which clearly indicated that we want to work with people from contrasting musical and cultural backgrounds; an open Webinar which explained the programme and why MTW was running it which included a diverse panel; one-to-one surgeries for potential applicants who wanted to ask further questions to help them frame their application; an initial sifting process and anonymising of applications by a person who is not involved in the interviews. The interview panel of three people includes one Welsh speaker and one Black artist.

We also recognise the importance of diversity of thought within our teams and are fully committed to embracing and maximising the talents of autistic people and those with dyslexia, ADHD and other forms of neurocognitive variation. We will always seek to make appropriate adjustments to recruitment, workplaces and work processes to be fully inclusive to people with different needs and working styles.

Action: We will continue to review the recruitment processes we use to attract new staff. We will continue to connect with external organisations who already employ and work with a diverse workforce, both locally and UK-wide; we will consult with Global Majority and Disabled colleagues;

we will explore alternative methods of reaching people through a variety of social media platforms, working with organisations who already have established networks with diverse communities.

Action: *We will refer to the Diversity Recruitment and workforce development toolkit provided by Arts Council England via Clear Assured.*

Action: *Through New Directions we will continue the process of working with Global Majority artists who are established in their own fields but new to the company and new to opera.*

Action: *We will balance the employment of creative teams for our performance work according to their artistic vision and the balance of equalities across our work, including female directors, designers and conductors, Global Majority artists and disabled creatives.*

Action: *We will continue working with a casting consultant who has a reputation for supporting the casting of diverse singers. Whenever possible we will include at least one global majority person on the auditioning panel.*

Action: *We will recruit backstage staff through established professional networks such as Mandy and will put increased pressure on the training institutions to support the development of a more diverse stage management and backstage workforce. As we begin to employ more diverse creative teams, we will also work with them to recruit the support teams they need, which will inevitably lead to new and more diverse contacts for MTW.*

Action: *For every production in our Live Performance strand, we aspire to include a minimum of one Welsh speaker. Whenever we are recruiting, we will actively promote the vacancies across Welsh platforms and networks.*

Action: *Core staff received two rounds of training during 2021 in EDI and subconscious bias. Further training will be provided on a regular basis.*

The art we make

MTW exists to present opera as a contemporary artform. For this to be real, the art we make needs to reflect and engage with society as it is and not as it once was.

Whilst this is an essential social action, ensuring that the arts are truly for all, it is also a critical artistic mission. By working with artists who have not previously participated in opera due to perceived as well as all too real exclusion, we will bring new life to the artform we love: new artists, new stories, new musical approaches and a new audience. We see this as an exciting creative opportunity.

This will bring significant change to the artists we work with and the nature of the work we make, and this will be driven by three aims:

- ! To work with established artists from different cultural backgrounds who will bring new ideas to opera as storytelling in music
- ! To reach new audiences with work that relates to who they are by artists from their own communities, be they ethnic, geographical, Welsh language (and potentially other languages) and other lived experiences
- ! To work directly with communities

Action: *Our work will undergo significant change – in its musical language, the stories we tell, the relevance of the issues our work explores, the way our work is presented and the audience we reach. We are creating new ways of presenting opera – as digital work; in short-form work that will be offered to communities in their own location; as Street Art; as theatre-based work that is created in a totally new way in collaboration with other organisations; with work that is led by young people.*

Action: *We will be creating more digital work, enabling many more people to see it, especially those who are unable to attend a live performance. Our digital work will not primarily focus on the capture and relay of live performance; it will become a creative platform in its own right. With New Directions we will create work for entirely new audiences, many of whom may not (yet) attend conventional live work. All digital work will be available with English and Welsh subtitles (and other languages if required), and will be available in audio-described versions.*

The people we reach

Action: *Through the new work we create, we will develop the range of professional and young artists we work with and the audiences we reach. We will deliver artist-led work that develops their own creative work and the artform we work in. We will deliver community-led work which uses storytelling in music as a means of developing the community's expressive voice, ideas and creativity. We will enable young creatives to develop their creative skills, methods of collaboration and confidence as artists and as individuals. We will offer an alternative pathway for people to use opera as storytelling in music that is relevant to their own lives and at the same time offer a new way for opera to evolve as a truly contemporary artform that has a genuine role to play with and for communities across Wales and the UK in the 2020s and beyond.*

Action: *We recognise we need to develop better data collection in order to understand who we are reaching with our work, and what areas we need to improve on to maximise engagement, especially with reference to equality and inclusion.*

Action: *We will explore ways in which we might be able to produce work with volunteers to help develop a greater degree of community, participation and ownership. This will need to come from specific artistic work which is made in direct connection with communities.*

Action: *We will foster new partnerships with external organisations to extend our engagement with diverse creatives and to broaden knowledge of the work we are doing.*

We will review this Strategic Plan on an annual basis.