



Kat's Appetite Story

Stories from Pub Corners

Introduction

Kat Boon, a local playwright, received funding through Appetite's The Kitchen to create the play *Stories from Pub Corners*. This support has been invaluable to Kat's development as an artist, leading her to form [Potboiler Theatre](#), through which she has produced further work, drawing on her experience with *Stories from Pub Corners*. Kat now feels a part of the local art scene and has the confidence to keep creating immersive theatre experiences which engage local people. It has also made reaching audiences who may not usually watch theatre an integral focus of her work.

Project information

Kat, working alongside local director Kat Hughes, researched and produced the play *Stories from Pub Corners*, which acted as a pilot for future performances. The project was supported by Appetite's The Kitchen, which provides funding to artists. Utilising the skills of local writers and actors, the play was performed in two Stoke pubs - The Holy Inadequate in Etruria, and The Leopard in Burslem - in summer 2014.

Kat's story

Kat first began writing for theatre in 2010, completing a year-long course in writing at Liverpool Playhouse. She later began working as an administrative

assistant at The New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme, which is where she first met Gemma, Appetite’s Creative Producer. Kat had an idea for a piece of work she wanted to create, but wasn’t sure what funding was available for this in Stoke until a conversation with Gemma about working as a producer led to Kat finding out about The Kitchen.

Kat already had some experience with pub theatre from her time in Liverpool, and felt it was a template that could work in Stoke. Gemma pointed her in the direction of different theatre companies in the Midlands region, and Kat watched pub theatre by Tin Box, a theatre company in Birmingham

With encouragement from Gemma, Kat successfully applied for funding from The Kitchen to carry out a research phase for her idea. She travelled nationally and regionally to further explore how others delivered pub theatre, and researched what was already on offer in the Midlands. This research phase gave Kat the opportunity to reflect on what she wanted to create and how to do it.

Kat then put together a report that drew on this research phase to outline her idea for pub theatre in Stoke. She applied again to The Kitchen, this time for funding to make an actual pilot project: Stories from Pub Corners. Along with Kat Hughes, who works as a Youth Theatre Director at the New Vic, she spent around three months writing and creating the production. As well as Kat, two other writers - one from Stoke, one from Birmingham -each wrote a story for the play.

Kat is originally from Newcastle-under-Lyme, and was keen to draw on local artists for Stories from Pub Corners. “We wanted to get local actors. We were a bit worried because there’s not a huge pool of them in Stoke compared to other cities, but we wanted to see who was out there locally,” explains Kat. They interviewed around ten actors and from this found three that they really wanted to work with, all from the local area. Working with local actors was useful for holding regular rehearsals, but also because they were more attached to the area. “And if you use local voices, that inspires another generation to make things in the future,” says Kat.

The local element extended beyond the writers, producers and performers for Stories from Pub Corners. Utilising local pubs meant they could engage with people who might not usually go to the theatre. “Pubs are great because some can be flexible and are already used to putting on events, and there’s already an audience there. It’s a place where people naturally go to relax, which is the kind of atmosphere you want to create,” explains Kat. “Any kind of artistic event that brings people together has the power to make people feel good and also strengthen those ties between people, which is very much behind what we’re trying to do at Potboiler.” Holding theatre in pubs was also helpful as it can be difficult to find traditional theatre spaces to use around Stoke.

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The first performance of Stories from Pub Corners was held in the busy side room of The Holy Inadequate. Most of the audience were people who had been to similar events before and had come along especially for the performance. They responded really well and Kat found it was a great atmosphere, although it wasn't entirely the audience she was aiming for.

Stories from Pub Corners' second performance, which took place at The Leopard in Burslem, tested out the play's "pop-up" element. The audience here consisted of people who were just out for a drink.

To suit this pop-up style, they chose to perform three stories that were quite

open and humorous in the hope that this would help engage the audience. "One of the stories worked really well. It was a funny, charming story with a charismatic actor. He managed to get the entire room on his side," says Kat. Another actor performed a different story in a side room, and this one didn't work as well. Some people were trying to ignore him and continue to have their own conversations, but he managed to get through it. "People didn't know what to make of it and were a little bit uneasy, which we don't want," Kat explains.

From running these two pilots of Stories from Pub Corners, Kat has taken the time to reflect on what did and didn't work to inform how Potboiler go about future performances.

Potboiler Theatre

It was through the experience of creating the pilot of Stories from Pub Corners that Kat and Kat Hughes decided to start up Potboiler Theatre.



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In August 2015, Potboiler further explored the pub theatre concept of Stories from Pub Corners through the Arts Council-funded production *The Rhapsodies* and *The Inn*.

Having received support from Appetite helped Kat apply for funding for *The Rhapsodies* and *The Inn* as she was given guidance on how to put together an application. As well as Arts Council funding, Potboiler also received support in-kind from The Mitchell Arts Centre and the New Vic Theatre, and marketing support from Appetite.

The Rhapsodies was a week of performances popping up in pubs (four pubs in Newcastle-under-Lyme, four in Stoke, and four in the Staffordshire Moorlands / Leek area) with actors performing a three-minute story. *The Inn* followed a week later, with three more pub performances: one in Newcastle, one in Stoke and one in Leek, which attracted some of the audience members who had seen *The Rhapsodies*.

Potboiler drew on their experience with *Stories from Pub Corners*, especially the pop-up format they piloted in *The Leopard*, as *The Rhapsodies* was also

performed to people who were already at the pub. This time, “with the learning that we didn’t want to force things on people,” they let the pub-goers know they



were about to put on a performance, and in some venues they went outside or into a side room or quiet part of the pub and invited people to come over to watch. “It worked really, really well,” says Kat.

Kat’s development as an artist

Through Appetite’s support, Kat believes her ambitions and development as an artist has benefitted hugely, and it has given her a real insight into further

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developing her career in the arts. “Now I feel like a producer and an artist,” says Kat. “The worlds of work and creativity felt really separate before, but now, it feels like those things can work together and that my future in that is possible now.”

As well as funding, The Kitchen provided Kat with marketing support that she found invaluable. She also found the supportive advice helpful for her artistic development, such as gaining local contacts and knowledge, and also guidance on how to find and apply for future funding. “It would be good to see more of The Kitchen,” says Kat, reflecting on its positive impact for emerging artists.

Her confidence as an artist has been boosted through the experience. “It does take a lot of confidence to say, ‘Okay, I’m going to create something and I think people will want to see it.’ That’s quite a bold thing to do, but I think having the backing and someone saying, ‘Give it a shot, we can support you’ is a huge thing. It’s made such a difference,” says Kat.

The Kitchen funding has helped lead onto other opportunities for Kat. As well as leading to the formation of Potboiler and the work they have produced, Kat was accepted onto The Optimists 2014 producer training scheme, and has been receiving a year of support through Birmingham Rep’s The Foundry artist development programme. These two things have been useful in giving her open networks and feeling like part of the arts’ scene locally and regionally.

The experience of using local artists and venues has impacted the way Kat approaches her work. “It’s given me a sense of the importance in trying to reach people who aren’t usually the audience for art,” Kat says. “It feels more valuable if you’re making stuff that’s going to be seen by people who wouldn’t usually see it, rather than just the privileged few. This ethos is really fundamental to Potboiler and what we’re going to do in the future.”

Kat feels that Appetite has done so much for the City as a whole, and has made her feel more integrated into the City than she was before. “It feels like you’re part of something special,” Kat says.

Being supported by The Kitchen has directly influenced Kat’s creative career, leading her to opportunities to create theatre that engages local people in interesting, unusual ways, while furthering her own practice as an artist.

What themes would you use to categorise this case study?

Artist development; engaging local people; definitions of quality art; skills development



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