

EXECUTIVE CREATIVE PRODUCER

RECRUITMENT INFORMATION

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OVERVIEW

Theatre Company Blah Blah Blah (the Blahs) is seeking an Executive Creative Producer to lead us into the next exciting phase of development for the company.

This will be a **2 day per week role fixed term until 31 March 2023** – with the expectation of further days in addition to this, to respond to project demands and periods of increased activity.

The Executive Creative Producer will be Chief Executive of the company reporting directly to the Board of Trustees.

We want to hear from people with a passion for theatre, storytelling and making sure that children and young people have the opportunity to take part in inspiring creative activities. This role will shape the vision and output of the company – this is an exciting opportunity to bring your passion, expertise, energy, ambition and artistic flair to define the future of the Blahs.



SALARY AND TERMS

Start date: W/c Monday 6th September 2021 (or as close to this date as possible)

Salary £34,250 pro rata

28 days holiday not including bank holidays (pro rata)

A company pension is available

- This is a flexible role and we are happy for the working days each week to change and be decided by the Executive Creative Producer to fit in with other work and responsibilities
- The Blahs have an office space at Interplay Theatre in Armley, Leeds (until April 2022) which is available to the Producer – after this time it is assumed that they will work from home/their base
- We are happy to consider other remote working arrangements including someone not based in Leeds
- This would be the only salaried role in the company, which is required for compliance – therefore we are not able to offer this as a freelance engagement
- This is a permanent appointment and we expect the successful candidate to continue to lead the company beyond March 2023 with new terms and conditions negotiated dependent on the outcome of the company's NPO application (see below).



ABOUT THE BLAHS

Formed by founding Artistic Director Anthony Haddon in 1985, the Blahs have a 36 year history of creating high quality theatre and creative experiences for children and young people about the things that matter to them.

We are passionate about exploring stories, not just telling them - and do not shy away from difficult or challenging subjects and ideas. We take work to wherever children and young people need it, including schools, theatres, community settings and museums.

We believe children and young people have the drive, capability and desire to be part of the dialogue about how we live in the world today - and by so doing, contribute to a more understanding, compassionate and inclusive society.

We are proud of the diverse stories we tell; the range of people we reach; and the work we do to meaningfully engage with children and young people who would not access the arts otherwise.

We engage in artistic and pedagogical research, which we use to develop as a company and share with partners, audiences and across the sector to stimulate learning and debate.

We have recently undertaken a successful period of recruitment to enhance our Board, adding three new trustees to further support the Blahs through this next exciting phase. This was in direct response to our commitment to ensuring our team is representative of the audiences and communities we serve.

Some milestones and history of the company can be found at: <https://www.blahs.co.uk/history/>

CONTEXT FOR THIS ROLE

Until 2018, The Blahs were an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), our annual programme generally included one to two schools' touring programmes, teacher CPD and a busy youth theatre as well as smaller partnership and commissioned projects.

Following the loss of core funding to the company, along with changes in educational policy which led to a significant downturn in schools bookings and income, we undertook a wholesale business review to plot a new course for the Blahs. The outcome of this included:

- Investing significant reserves to support the transition to a 'project funded' company and operations, with greatly reduced core staffing and a team of freelance 'Associates' bringing extra capacity and expertise as required to support projects
- Galvanising the company to refocus our creative output on the creation of touring theatre for small scale and community venues (as opposed to work that tours into schools settings) – with active consideration of children age 8+ who we know are underserved in the UK touring ecology
- Continuing to work meaningfully with schools through new models and in new settings
- Forging new models of partnership, collaboration and co-production to support the realisation of our creative ambition

Our current Artistic Director, Deborah Pakkar-Hull, joined us in 2014 and has led the company artistically and organisationally through this period of transition, the success of which cannot be overstated. Since our departure from NPO we have worked with a team of diverse, exceptional and award-winning artists and arts professionals; attracted funding from a range of Trusts, Foundations and other sources to develop new offers for schools; engaged in new partnerships across education, arts and heritage; and realised new high quality touring theatre. Despite not being an NPO, the Arts Council continue to actively support the company.



Deborah will step down from this role at the end of 2021, but we are delighted that she will maintain a relationship with the Blahs to add to our growing pool of 'Associates' and direct two upcoming productions for the company (see Recent and Upcoming Work below). There is a purposeful overlap between Deborah and the Executive Creative Producer to ensure support to this role and a smooth handover.

Despite the huge achievements of this time, it is clear that for the Blahs to fully realise our potential and artistic ambitions – particularly when seeking to maintain regular provision for 8+ - it is essential that we have the security and foundation for long-term planning that NPO enables. Therefore re-entry to the National Portfolio is central to our ambitions, and the focus of the Executive Creative Producer role.

Also attached to this recruitment pack is a research report created by Dr El Stannage commissioned by the Blahs in August 2020 which sets out the landscape and challenges of touring theatre for children age 8 to 13.

WORKING TOGETHER

We are open, flexible and excited to hear from people with a range of backgrounds and experience. Primarily this role should be a partnership and collaboration where your passion, experience and interests are combined with the Blahs' ethos, mission and values, to shape the future of the company.

We think that the right person to work with us as Executive Creative Producer...

- Shares in our belief that positive social change can come about through theatre as a means of exploring important issues that matter to society and how we live in the world
- Is a confident leader who is thoughtful, strategic and caring in their approach. Someone who thrives on collaboration and is able to build high-level partnerships with a range of organisations and stakeholders
- Makes things happen and enjoys taking the seed of an idea and turning it into a reality
- Is excited to help define the artistic vision of the company, imagine inspiring theatre productions and creative projects and bring together and lead teams to make them happen
- Is passionate about championing access and celebrating diversity throughout the company, the stories we tell and who tells them. We want our team to reflect the voices, backgrounds and experiences of the range of children and young people we serve. Therefore we are especially keen to hear from people traditionally underrepresented in the arts including people who identify as working class, people who experience racism and ableism and people who identify as LGBTQIA+
- Seeks to be led by the voices of children and young people and what they need – finding ways for them to influence the work from the earliest stage and inform the direction of the company



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO THE EXECUTIVE CREATIVE PRODUCER

There will be support for the Executive Creative Producer through the Finance Officer at 0.5 days per week and Administrator at 0.5 days per week, and resources to cover basic overheads (admin, legal, accountancy, insurance etc) for the length of the contract, whilst still maintaining our minimum reserves position.

In addition to this, there is c£2000 to aid the Executive Creative Producer in shaping the vision for the company and imagining a programme of activity. This could be for activities such as:

- Meetings or creative ideas sessions with artists and creative teams
- Specialist advice or consultancy
- Extra paid time to pursue opportunities
- Undertaking research, going to conferences etc
- Whatever would best enable you to do the role!

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Vision and Creative Leadership

Work with Associates and Board to devise and deliver the creative vision of the Company and provide vital strategic development, including:

- Shaping and defining long term creative vision
- Creatively responding to commissions and briefs
- Identifying and inducting new artists to the Blahs' way of working

Arts Council NPO application

In consultation with the Board, Associates and Finance Officer, to lead on the development of the NPO application, including:

- Scoping and developing the creative programme
- Researching and defining the staff team and structure to deliver the NPO
- Writing the application and preparing the required supporting materials/documentation

Initiating new projects

Strategic lead for development of projects and associated fundraising including:

- Sourcing and developing partners and supporters locally and nationally
- Leading on development and implementation of fundraising plan for individual new projects (including Arts Council, Trusts and Foundations, earned income etc)

Producing creative projects

Lead producer for creative projects working with freelance and Associate Artists including:

- Scoping, planning and developing new work
- Developing partnership strategy, carrying out tour booking and relationship building

Management

- Carrying out day to day management of the company's finance, charitable responsibilities and legal compliance (in collaboration with Finance Officer)
- Managing all staff, freelancers and Associates
- Representing the Blahs at meetings and industry events

Evaluation and reporting

- Managing relationships with, and reporting to key stakeholders (ACE, local authority, partner networks)
- Commissioning research to support the strategic and artistic development of the company, and to promote sectoral learning and position

Communications

- Devising audience development and marketing strategies for the company and projects supported by Associates and freelance staff

A Note on Capacity:

It is important to note that these responsibilities differ across the year according to project delivery and the rhythm of the annual programme. It is expected that as new projects are agreed and initiated they will bring further resourcing and increased days for the Executive Creative Producer – not that this is all delivered within 2 days per week.

EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS

ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
Experience, Skills and Knowledge	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producing new work • Project management • Recruiting and supervising freelance artists and staff • Strategic project development • Managing sizeable and annual budgets • Creating work for children/young people • Good understanding of Arts Council England priorities, funding streams and application processes • Fundraising for creative projects • Monitoring and data capture for range of funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing network of relevant contacts in West Yorkshire region • Marketing and audience development • Creative consultation/engaging potential audiences in development of work • Experience of tour booking • Experience of multi-year fundraising/writing an NPO application
Personal Attributes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed to access and inclusion • Good business acumen • Passionate about creating opportunities for young people • Skilled at building relationships and working with people • Respectful and supportive of artistic processes • Committed to sharing learning/ improving the sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquisitive and unafraid to do things differently

We aim to interview all candidates who meet all the essential criteria and identify as being part of a protected characteristic group.

RECENT AND UPCOMING WORK

The Vultures' Song (2017 to 2020)

Conceived through an international partnership with Delhi-based Yellowcat Theatre and written by Mike Kenny, *The Vultures' Song* was inspired by the Partition of India – exploring migration, journeys, loss and identity for children age 8+.

The project was a significant marker in our transition to a new touring model and establishing our position in the national touring ecology; the production toured theatres, community venues and schools, and was nominated for Best Play for Young Audiences at the 2019 Writers' Guild Awards.

Trailer: <https://youtu.be/H79AVURhXPE>

A short overview of the creative context: <https://youtu.be/wVeZbXRjfcw>

A full version of the work, recorded at Square Chapel Arts Centre: <https://youtu.be/J2CbApty2xs>

Stirring Up The Past (2018 to 2021)

A partnership project with Leeds Museums & Galleries (and specifically Leeds Discovery Centre – home to more than 1 million artefacts) to tell the stories of local historical figures, particularly those often marginalised in historical discourse.

Our intention was to create a site specific performance at Leeds Discovery Centre, however the impact of CV-19 has meant we have reimagined different ways of sharing these stories

- Classroom resources (launching June this year)
A series of films and audio pieces that follow the life of a single artefact from ancient Egypt to modern day Leeds
- Audio Walk
An audio walk for children and families around Leeds city centre telling the story of a number of important figures including Leonora Cohen who was imprisoned for throwing a stone through the window of Leeds Labour Exchange in protest against women not having the vote, and Pablo Fanque, a British circus owner in the early 1800's of African heritage

Guerrilla Gardening – working title (R&D summer 2021, creation and preview tour summer 2022)

A new touring work for studio theatres and community venues about urban gardening for children age 3 to 6 and their families.

The story of an older man and a young child who transform their grey inner city block of flats through growing plants, shrubs and food. A celebration of owning and inhabiting the spaces we live in – and of gardening to unite communities. It will also be a gentle introduction to activism, climate change and food poverty.

In June and July this year we will be carrying out R&D on the project in partnership with Trees For Cities and their Edible Playgrounds initiative. We are then looking towards full development and a preview tour in summer 2022 with Deborah Pakkar-Hull directing the work in an Associate capacity.

Anna Hibiscus' Song (R&D summer 2021)

An adaptation of the Anna Hibiscus books by Atinuke and a Co-Production with Sheffield-based Utopia Theatre for children age 3 to 8.

Anna lives in “Amazing Africa” with her Canadian mother, African father and extended family. A joyous coming together of multiple heritages and experiences drawing on African theatre techniques of music, interaction and storytelling.

R&D on the project will take place between May and August this year, involving work with Early Years' settings. Beyond the R&D, Deborah will again work on this project in an Associate Director role.

Pride in Me – working title (Early exploration Summer 2021)

As part of our commitment to supporting schools to engage with PHSE and relationships, we have been having conversations with a number of companies/artists about a new touring production and schools project for older children (age 8 to 13) exploring gender and identity.

We are looking at a piece that celebrates a range of identities, defying stereotypes and being who you are. In July this year we have a number of 'play dates' with LGBTQIA+ artists and creatives to begin to define this work further.

2022-23 Plans

We are planning that 2022-23 will see a significant 'scaling up' of the company's operation in preparedness for NPO – including the creation and preview tour of the Guerrilla Gardening production. Planning for creating and fundraising for this work is already underway.



HOW TO APPLY

We want to know how you would deliver this role and how it would look for you. In your application we would like you to tell us:

- A bit about your relevant experience/transferable skills that would help you in undertaking this role
- How you would go about delivering this role
- How you would develop the NPO application including how you might use the £2000 budget available
- What excites you most about this opportunity
- How we can support you to succeed in this role

You can tell us this in writing - no more than 3 pages of A4. Or by video (selfie style with a camera phone is fine) or audio – no more than 6 minutes.

Please also send us some more information to help us get a sense of you and your skills and experience relevant to this role – this could be a link to a website, examples of previous work, your CV or anything else that you think would best communicate this.

If you would like to apply in another format, or have access requirements you need us to support in order to apply, please get in touch with us: admin@blahs.co.uk

Deadline for applications: Tuesday 15 June 2021 at 5pm

Start date:

W/c 6 September 2021 (or as close to this date as possible)

Talk to us:

If you would like to have an informal chat with a member of our Board about this role before applying please contact admin@blahs.co.uk and we can arrange this.

Interviews:

Are scheduled to take place on Friday 9th July in Leeds. Our intention is that interviews will be in-person (subject to national restrictions at the time).

As a part of the interview process, we will also be asking shortlisted candidates to take part in an activity via Zoom lasting 45 minutes on either Monday 28th or Tuesday 29th June. The timing of the session will be negotiated with candidates.

When you apply, please let us know if you are not available on any of the dates specified, or if you have needs/circumstances which mean you could take part in interview remotely (via Zoom) but not in person.