

# Artistic Vision for Derby LIVE

## Derby LIVE's mission:

***Derby LIVE presents and produces an excellent and diverse programme of performing arts. It is innovative, inclusive and sustainable. Rooted in Derby, it talks to the world.***

To support the mission statement, Derby LIVE has a number of overarching strategic objectives:

- embed Derby LIVE as a sustainable model for the production and presentation of the performing arts in Derby
- increase the quantity and diversity of Derby LIVE's learning and inclusion provisions and support the local professional and amateur community
- provide a balanced and sustainable programme of high quality performing arts for Derby
- develop Derby's festival, events and city centre space hire programme
- maximise all commercial activity, sponsorship and development opportunities to support Derby LIVE's mission and objectives
- continue to improve Derby LIVE's venues and facilities and to create a blue print for the future of performance spaces in the city
- continue to develop Derby LIVE's organisational infrastructure, competencies and capacity to ensure we deliver excellent customer service and value for money.

## Derby LIVE = Excellence + Diversity + Sustainability

Derby LIVE's vision for producing theatre is neither separate to, nor separable from, Derby LIVE's vision as a whole. Derby LIVE aims to achieve an **artistic communitas** through creativity, connectivity and complementarity.

Under Derby LIVE all the performing art-forms have equal status and are programmed across all venues. Product is programmed into venues on the basis of "Best Fit" determined by artistic and technical requirements, financial viability and anticipated audience size.

Derby LIVE's vision is being systematically developed and refined as it undergoes an intensive three-year period of action research. This is entirely appropriate for an operation which is a learning organisation and which places reflective practice at its heart. The vision is being developed through ongoing, rigorous internal monitoring and evaluation, as well as through regular external consultations. These include consultations with its Advisory Board, its panel of Artistic Associates, selected consultants and relevant Arts Council members of staff.

The values and principles upon which Derby LIVE is based are not, however, subject to change. This underlying ideology is summarised in a section of Derby's arts strategy which explicates the unique value of the arts:

## THE VALUE of the ARTS

*Art is a way of saying what it means to be alive*

Richard Powers

### **The Unique Selling Point (USP) of the Arts**

[Other sections of Derby's arts strategy] examine the impact which the arts can have within other agendas. However, similar cross-cutting claims can be made for areas other than the arts – most notably, other areas within the cultural sector such as sports, museums and libraries. So what, if anything, can the arts contribute which is distinct from the contributions made by other aspects of human existence? What, if anything, is the “USP” of the arts?

To begin to understand the USP of the arts, one must first appreciate that any work of art, by definition, works on at least two planes of meaning simultaneously. There is the “actual” presence of the work of art itself located within the “real” world – the photograph which we can see, the music we can hear or the sculpture we can touch. But there is also the “metaphorical” presence of the work of art which is encountered when the photograph is seen or the music heard or the sculpture touched. This is the “hidden” significance of the work of art. And these hidden significances will vary from reader to reader, from reading to reading. They are neither a constant nor a given. But they are fundamental to the work being defined as “art”. Let us take an example to elucidate the point.

If I see a pile of concrete dumped on a building site, that is most likely what I will perceive it as – a pile of concrete dumped on a building site. However, if that same concrete is skilfully crafted and presented in such a way that I am encouraged to read into that shaped concrete significances, questions and/or resonances “above and beyond” its actuality – if, that is, I am persuaded to read that concrete as having metaphorical meaning(s) – the concrete has, arguably, been transformed into a work of art. It is still a lump of concrete but it is simultaneously also something other than a lump of concrete. It is a metaphor. It is something more than itself.

### **So what?**

Well, first of all, if a work of art possesses not just its own literal reality but also reverberations and significances stemming from its metaphorical dimension, then the work can “say” more to us than a mere slice of real life. Art is not reality but reality intensified. It is a distillation of the human condition. It is life experienced and explored under the magnifying glass. Thus, art is essential to human survival and development. There are no cases of human races which have not used art to explore, interpret and, ultimately, understand their world. Art

gives meaning, shape, sense and form to the chaos and confusion which is our existence. It is a record of our response to our realities.

**And not only that.**

Because all art is metaphor, art enables us not only to explore life-as-it-is but also life-as-it-might-be. Art does not simply re-create or re-present the world. Art provides us with possible other worlds, different realities, alternative interpretations and differing viewpoints from our own. Through human craft, expertise and endeavour, raw materials (sounds, colours, words, and the like) are shaped into possible “other” worlds, different truths and alternative potentialities. Through the “unreality” of art we encounter other realities. Is it any wonder, then, that when we dream, we dream fiction, not fact? Dreams do not reproduce the known, dreams show us what might be.

**And not only that.**

Because art is intrinsically pleasurable – even when dealing with the most horrific subject matters – and because art is not reality but removed from it, art enables us to encounter, in thought and feeling, aspects of human existence which would otherwise be unbearable. When Perseus slew the Gorgon, he couldn’t look directly at it or he would have been turned into stone. Consequently, he used the reflection in his shield to help him overcome the monster. Art works in the same way as Perseus’ shield – it “holds the mirror up to Nature” and allows us to confront the realities of being human. However, because art is not reality, it allows us to do this – like Perseus’s shield – at arm’s length, in a safe, secure manner without exposing us to genuine danger.

**And not only that.**

Art works on both the cognitive and the emotional planes. It is about both thought and feeling. Art does not just educate the mind but also the heart. Art is about the totality of being a human being.

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The basic principles upon which Derby LIVE’s mission and vision are based are also enshrined within two other recent documents. One of these is the McMaster Review, *Supporting excellence in the arts – from measurement to judgement*. This review places excellence at the heart of the arts, and so does Derby LIVE. The arts can only thrive and achieve their full impact if excellence is all-pervasive. The use of the highest-quality personnel, the greatest rigour in planning, delivery and evaluation, and the desire to innovate and risk-take at all times are key to Derby LIVE’s attainment of excellence in all that it does.

The other key document which complements Derby LIVE’s fundamental ideology is the Arts Council’s *Public value and the arts in England: Discussion*

*and conclusions of the arts debate.* In congruence with this, Derby LIVE builds people's capacity to enjoy and appreciate the arts and, through that, to enjoy and understand the world in which they live. Derby LIVE enriches people's experience of life, providing colour, beauty, enjoyment, relaxation and a source of pleasure and escape. Derby LIVE's dedication to diversity, as well as recognising and celebrating cultural differences, also brings people together, creating links between different communities and encouraging people to feel a sense of pride and belonging in their local area.

## **In greater detail, Derby LIVE achieves its mission and vision by:**

### **Under the leadership of the Artistic Producer:**

- Programming and producing the highest-quality theatrical product – the lion's share of which is rarely, if at all, available elsewhere in the region. This includes, and prioritises, new work, largely overlooked classics, and top-quality 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century work which may have had significant exposure in London but not in the region.
- Co-producing with the highest-calibre, building and non-building based professional theatre companies locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Special attention is given to companies capable of bringing an artistically "different" offer to that normally provided within Derby LIVE's programme, affording artistic development opportunities for Derby LIVE's artists, staff and audiences.
- Selection of suitable co-producing partners/product involves the utilisation of ACE's GFTA assessment criteria, with "Artistic Excellence" being a non-negotiable criterion. As well as allowing clear, transparent reasoning for choosing certain co-production material, this also enables (just as importantly) clear, structured grounds for rejecting co-production offers.
- Where Derby LIVE does not take the "artistic lead" in a co-production, it endeavours to ensure artistic quality through the Artistic Producer acting as "artistic advisor" to the process. This involves the Artistic Producer in discussions around casting, creative team formation, attending production meetings and occasional rehearsals, especially rehearsal-room runs. In like manner, Derby LIVE's Learning and Inclusion Manager is responsible for ensuring that all educational and participatory work accompanying co-productions is of apposite content and commensurate with Derby LIVE's own quality standards. Similarly, Derby LIVE's Production Manager has responsibility for ensuring that staff development opportunities afforded through co-producing activity are fully capitalised upon. This may involve Derby LIVE staff taking up temporary placements with co-producing partners whilst Derby LIVE "back-fills" with the relevant "opposite numbers" from the co-producer's company. These measures are designed not only to ensure the highest quality of co-productions and associated activity but also shared "ownership" of co-produced product.
- Generating, and being central to, a professional theatre ecology for the sub-region. This includes working with (either in a co-producing capacity or "in association with") the best, and most promising, theatre companies and practitioners across the city and county. (An "in association with" production

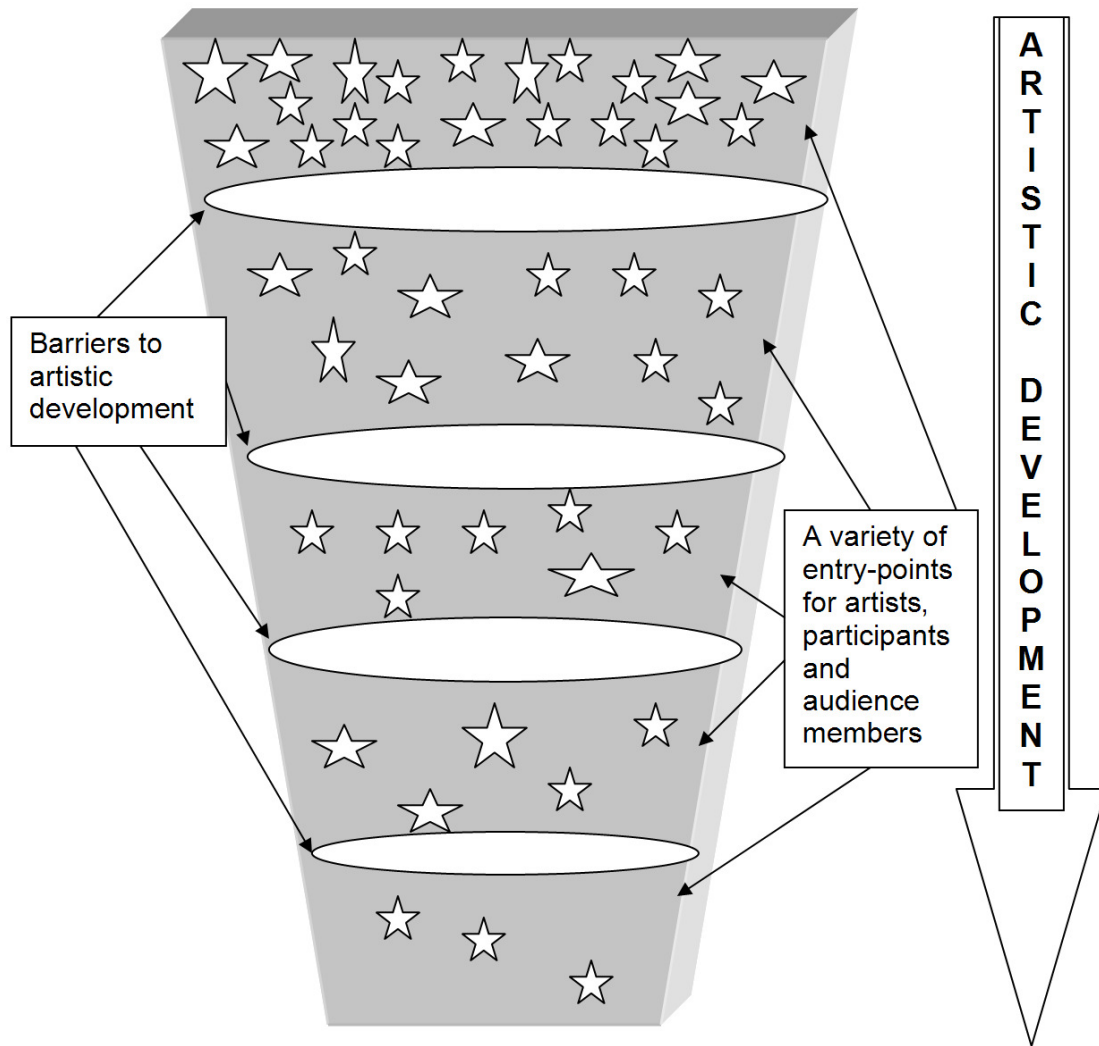
denotes contribution – normally in-kind – and involvement from Derby LIVE’s artistic team, but neither is at the same level as in the case of a co-production.) The continuing development of a theatre ecology for the sub-region also includes facilitating training opportunities, work placements, providing rehearsal accommodation where possible, and regular communication and knowledge-sharing.

### **Under the leadership of the Learning and Inclusion Manager:**

- Providing a continuum of cradle-to-grave learning and participatory theatrical activities across all facets of theatre-making. This involves: a Youth Theatre, Community Theatre, work placements, education days and twilight workshops connected with specific productions, pre- and post-show discussions, accredited training for volunteers, backstage tours, open days, training workshops for amateur companies and practitioners, accredited training opportunities in technical theatre, bespoke coaching for drama school auditions, INSET for teachers, ArtsAward accreditation, and partnership working with formal education providers, including the University of Derby (UoD). The Learning and Inclusion Manager, along with relevant Derby LIVE and UoD staff, ensures that artistic, educational, social and financial opportunities arising from Derby LIVE’s unique partnership with the UoD are optimised. This includes direct input by Derby LIVE staff into the University’s curricula, work placement and volunteering opportunities for UoD students across Derby LIVE’s venues and programmes, and also paid work opportunities for UoD students.
- Providing on-going participatory programmes for groups which face greater barriers to engagement with theatrical activity. This will include, under the responsibilities of the Learning and Inclusion Officer, programmes in partnership with HM Prison service, Long Journey Home, the PRU and the Youth Offending service, plus programmes of activity with groups from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds as well as groups with a spectrum of disabilities.

This approach is encapsulated by the following diagram. It graphically demonstrates how each of us – as artists, participants and/or audience members – has a different “entry point” into the arts. This entry point will normally be determined by a whole range of cultural, socio-economic, educational, experiential, gender, diversity and equalities issues. However, each of us has the capability to progress further along the path of artistic advancement (i.e. “further down the funnel”). What prevents us from doing this is the wide variety of barriers which are across our individual and/or collective paths. As with the range of entry points, these barriers will also be the product of a whole range of cultural, socio-economic, educational, experiential, gender, diversity and equalities issues. They will also be the product – and we are on dangerous ground here – of innate “artistic ability” (i.e. “talent”). All of us, if we so wish, given the removal of all “external” barriers, will eventually reach our optimal point of artistic development – the point at which we have reached the limit of our artistic abilities. However, each of us can progress further along the path of artistic development from the place we currently hold (in Vygotskian terms, across our “zone of proximal development”) if we are afforded appropriate experiential support, enablement and opportunity. It is the mission of Derby LIVE to aim to overcome all barriers

to artistic advancement (apart from that of innate ability) by providing a diverse programme of consistently high-quality theatrical product and participatory activity, allowing artists, participants and audiences to “come on board” at a point at which they feel comfortable and confident, and then to progress along their own paths of artistic advancement through engaging, developmental and challenging experiences and opportunities. It is also Derby LIVE’s mission to ensure that, through the same processes, each and every person’s innate artistic abilities are given the optimal conditions in which to grow and thrive.



(adapted from Slack et al, 2004, p. 134)

### **Under the leadership of the Outdoor Events Manager:**

- Enhancing people's experience of the city centre and driving customer footfall through high quality and innovative planning and programming of activity in open spaces. This adds value to, while not detracting from, core business activity in the city centre and beyond.
- Ensuring that identified spaces within the city centre and its environs achieve optimal cultural, economic and social impact.
- Enabling the programmed activities across these spaces to achieve the desired blend, balance and breadth.
- Animating these spaces with programmes of activity which are consistently high in quality and innovative in content.
- Ensuring that programmes of activity across these spaces, when assessed as a whole, respond effectively and proportionately to cultural, economic and social priorities.
- Facilitating a co-ordinated and consistent approach to managing, planning, programming, pricing, promoting, operating and evaluating activities across these spaces.
- Balancing outcomes and costs within a defined ring-fenced budget.
- Regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the programmed provision in achieving these aims and objectives.

### **Under the leadership of the Programme Manager:**

Derby LIVE's **presented** programme is based on the same ideology as its produced programme and its learning and inclusion work. The presented programme can be broadly broken down into two areas – Promotions and Hires.

**Promotions:** involve Derby LIVE providing the venue and absorbing the hire charge into the financial deal with the agent or promoter. Promotions generally involve Derby LIVE buying/commissioning product and accepting an element of risk. Financial deal examples include the payment of a guaranteed fee, first calls and a range of splits on the box office takings.

**Hires:** involve the payment of a hire fee to Derby LIVE for the use of the venue. Hirers can be commercial promoters, individual artists or local organisations and amateur groups. Reduced hire rates can be offered to support local organisations, charities and performances/events which support the mission.

To ensure that the strategic objectives of Derby LIVE are met, a proactive, curatorial approach to programming is taken. The aim is to ensure that the programme is:

**Balanced and Relevant:** there is a broad mix across the performing art forms reflecting the social and cultural diversity of the city and the region. The programme balance also reflects demand and market size.

**Sustainable/Financially Robust:** the programme is required to achieve the large surplus necessary to operate within subsidy. The programme also needs to develop new and future audiences. Space also has to be allocated within the diary so that the income target for rentals can be achieved.

**High Quality:** the product presented meets and hopefully exceeds and raises customer expectations. The artistic quality is concomitant with that of Derby LIVE's produced work.

When considering product offered/sourced for promotion and investment by Derby LIVE, the following selection criteria apply:

- Will the product be of high artistic quality?
- Will the product/deal produce a favourable financial return?
- Will the product help develop/sustain new audiences?
- Will the product add to the balance/relevance of the programme?
- Will it enable us to develop a new partnership?
- Will it enable us to be involved in a citywide/regional/national initiative?

The level of risk on each potential promotion is assessed on an individual basis and against the overall risk exposure, both artistically and financially, of the season in which it is proposed.

### **Hire Product**

Although hire product generally presents guaranteed income and little risk, the following criteria are applied before accepting product:

- Will it be of the high quality expected of the programme?
- Will it adversely affect any other product within the programme?
- Will it produce the most favourable return to the business unit?
- Will it add to the balance/relevance of the programme?
- Will it provide accessibility to the community/amateur sector?

### **Quality Control**

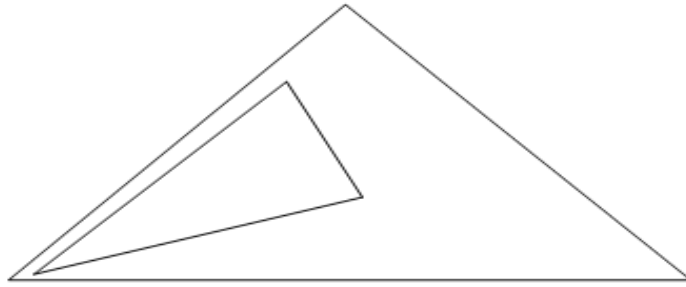
Derby LIVE controls the quality of the product presented at its venues.

However, it also accepts the need to take risks by providing opportunities for new and emerging artists and promoters and also by providing access for the community. Where possible quality control is exercised by:

- Customer/staff feedback from previous appearances.
- Seeking references from other venues which have hosted the product, or have worked with the producers/artists.
- Critical review from relevant press and trade papers.
- Credit rating checks.
- When possible and applicable, by travelling to see the product in another venue.
- Membership and active involvement with benchmarking groups from country-wide venues to research shows and current industry best practice.

Derby LIVE's programming policy details our commitment to quality as well as an acknowledgement that each and every facet of our offer should hit at least two aspects of the "holy trinity" of **artistic, social and financial merit**. Thus, a production by the Derby Live Youth Theatre might aim to achieve something like the following:

**Artistic quality**

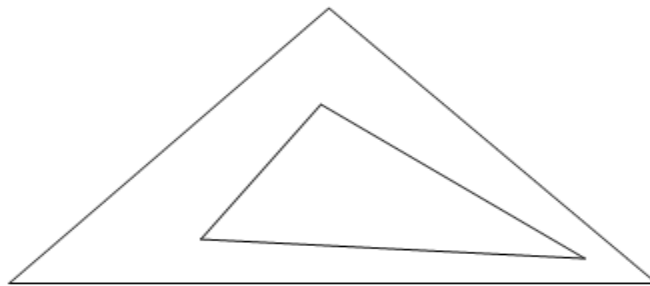


**Social contribution**

**Financial contribution**

Whereas a concert by a pop band might look something like:

**Artistic quality**

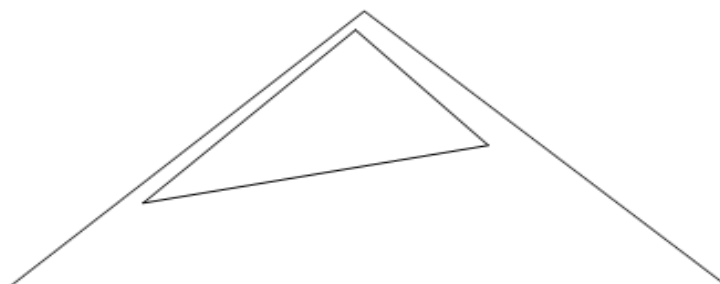


**Social contribution**

**Financial contribution**

And a modern chamber music concert might be:

**Artistic quality**



**Social contribution**

**Financial contribution**

### **In summary**

All these strands of Derby LIVE's offer are underpinned by an identical belief-system – the same belief-system which gave birth to the Derby LIVE concept in the first place. Derby LIVE is designed to help achieve, through a cohesive and co-ordinated excellent artistic provision, a social environment where people are able to create, connect and operate in complementarity. This is

what was meant at the outset by Derby LIVE's vision to create an **artistic  
communitas**.