



THE UK'S THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

GREENING OUR THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

A guide for creative teams working with the Unicorn Theatre.

Published January 2020.

At the Unicorn we are working towards an environmentally sustainable model for all our activities. We've made progress and we're now looking harder at our most important activity – the 12-15 productions we make every year – to see how we can improve our sustainability practice onstage.

Background

Children and young people demand action on climate change, and we've been proud of our headline achievements over the last few years:

- We've reduced our energy use related emissions significantly since our baseline year (2018-19 compared to 2012-13).
- We switched to a fully renewable electricity supply in April 2019.
- We've reduced our water consumption by 35% since our baseline year (2018-19 compared to 2012-13).
- For the last three years, we have consistently recycled between 50% and 60% of our waste.

However, tracking improvement becomes more difficult when we move beyond simple measurements like our energy consumption, and start assessing the flow of materials in and out of the building.

Across the 18/19 year, our Production Department undertook a benchmarking exercise to see what we used in constructing and running our shows, where we were sourcing it from, how we were using it, and how we were disposing of it.

We learned some important lessons that year about minimising waste, and making productions more sustainable. From now on, we'd like to take creatives and stage management with us as we set our goals for future working.

This guidance document is a template for how we plan to work together.

GREENING OUR PRODUCTIONS IN PRACTICE

Time gives us choices

The more time we have to assess and realise designs, the more sustainable we can be. We commit to detailed conversations with Designers and Directors about realistic design deadlines which leave plenty of scope for a sustainable approach.

The biggest single step Designers can take towards a sustainable production is to meet the deadlines set.

A new hierarchy for building and sourcing

As our 19/20 season gets underway, we're applying a new hierarchy for building and sourcing. Here we see sustainable choices going in hand-in-hand with ethical procurement. Everyone involved in building set or sourcing props should approach their work with this hierarchy in mind:

- 1. Use what we have in stock**

Then look to

- 2. Borrow or hire**

Then look to

- 3. Buy locally**

Then look to

- 4. Buy online**

The detail

Here's how we can support stage management and creatives to work effectively to apply that hierarchy:

Use what we have in stock

- Sets for several of our past shows are in storage in a unit in Kent, and there are Props and Costume Stores in the basement of the Unicorn Theatre.
- An inventory of the Props Store took place in summer 2018 – all items now sit on a database, for easy handling of enquiries from other theatre companies, as well as our own stage management and creative teams.
- An inventory of the Costume Store is due to take place in spring 2020, and an inventory of the storage unit is due in summer 2020. This will widen our capacity to reuse and repurpose our stock, as well as to hire to other theatre companies.
- Over 18/19, a set of masking flats was built for the Weston. It has eight main units, with have interchangeable returns and extensions giving us flexibility in configuration. All the hardware on the pieces is placed in the same location meaning all the pieces can connect to each other. We give the dimensions of this set to designers at the start of the design process. In 18/19, we also made floor grilles and trucks for particular shows, but with the idea of reuse in mind.
- Timber from previous shows is kept in the workshop for reuse for as long as possible.

Borrow or hire

- At the Unicorn we have built connections with Production Managers at a wide number of venues so that we can borrow or loan items from other theatre stores.
- Post on Set Exchange for what you need.
- Sometimes shouting out to the staff team here, or putting a call out for ideas on social networks, can be useful.

Buy locally

- We encourage you to support independent shops where possible, and shop in your neighbourhood as well as in Zone 1.
- Deptford Market is a short train ride from the Unicorn (London Bridge to Deptford). It has a large flea market section, and runs on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Buy online

- Sign up to Give As You Live, with the Unicorn as your nominated charity, to generate donations for everything you buy.
- Look for pre-used items and items which can be collected locally on EBay.
- Prioritise websites that support independent makers and / or take an ethical standpoint eg. Etsy, Ethical Superstore.
- Large-scale online providers with rapid delivery promises should be used as a last resort, only when time and other constraints make all other options impossible.

What we aim to save, and how you can help us do it

We took a detailed look at our use of consumables in 18/19. Here are some examples of what we used, and here's what we'd like to use less of in future years.

Item	Used in 18/19	Our goals for 19/20 and 20/21	How we plan to do it
Spray paint	29 aerosol tins	5 tins	Keep good quality sprayguns in our stores, and train freelance staff how to use them, so paint can be applied by compressors instead of aerosol.
Texturing Finishes and Products	75kg	25kg	The application of products such as texturing paste renders wood and MDF un-reusable. While we cannot avoid the use of these entirely, it would be a positive step to explore other options, or consider whether set elements placed at a distance from the audience need such treatments.
Gaffer tape	26 rolls	26 rolls	We'll probably use the same amount of gaffer tape, but we are exploring options which have paper inner tubes, fabric or paper based backings, and adhesive that is applied in as environmentally-friendly a way as possible.
LX tape	70 rolls	35 rolls	We use these mainly for tidying lighting cables. We've been given a large number of Velcro cable ties – we're gradually swapping out PVC tape for these re-useable straps. Eventually we want to move to attaching all cables in the lighting rig with these ties, and phasing out LX tape as much as possible.
Spray adhesive	14 tins	7 tins	Adhesives are often used when time is short. With longer lead-ins to realise designs, we could use other options during set builds.

Here are other areas we'd like to save on waste

- We'd like to switch from disposable batteries to rechargeable ones.
- No antibacterial gel, non-biodegradable wipes or single use plastics to be purchased for rehearsal room or stage.
- Compressor staples, like adhesives, make it harder for us to reuse or recycle timber. We encourage set builders to use nails or screws instead.
- We print one daily call sheet here, and put it on the show notice board.
- Returns week will involve posting items on Scenery Salvage or Set Exchange.
- For costume, we discourage ordering excessive options for each fitting online – it wastes transport energy, packaging materials and time. Returns aren't always put back on sale, but are disposed of, creating more waste.
- We work with our waste company, First Mile, on detailed recycling streams for the theatre. As well as mixed recycling, we have dedicated bins for food waste, flexible plastics (like films and cellophane), batteries, printer cartridges, lamps, IT, electricals, coffee cups, stationery, and crisp packets. When you start work with us, your induction should include the locations of these points – we expect you in turn to pass this information on to cast and other staff.

We ask that designs are planned with the following ideas in mind:

- Disposal costs must also come in on budget and will be considered as part of the initial costing and approval of the show design.
- As much as possible build to accommodate stock sizes of steel deck, truss, ply board and other materials to reduce cutting waste and over purchasing.
- No non-biodegradable glitter, snow or plastic drops.
- No balloons.
- Single use plastics only used if each item is used for the entire run.
- Paint finishes should be achievable with a compressor and paint to avoid the use of aerosols and spray paints.
- Any paint finish will renders the base material un-recyclable or un-resuable must be considered in relation to its visual proximity to the audience.
- We expect designers to be open to reasonable alternatives if it means the item can be sourced locally or borrowed.

Summary

These new parameters will form an Appendix to Stage Management and creative team contracts, and will be available to download from our website so our audience and other stakeholders know our aims and methodology.

The ideas here will be reinforced and amplified in early conversations, building inductions, advice and mentoring, and Production Meetings. We know that the enthusiasm to work to a higher sustainable standard is there, and we know that these strong guidelines will give people a framework to achieve it.