

CULTURAL COLLISIONS PRESENTS

Giving voices to culture



SOUNDING BOARD

2025

REFLECTIONS FROM FREELANCERS

Bring

together to imagine a stronger future for creativity across the Humber

SOUNDING BOARD

WELCOME

Welcome to Sounding Board: Reflections from freelancers. This publication has been put together to reflect on the arts gathering Sounding Board that took place on Tuesday 14th October 2025.

FUNDERS



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Cultural Collisions

Cultural Collisions brings sector leaders together to strengthen cultural activity in our region, advocating for arts and culture through a shared voice. Members are representatives of current and recent National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and Local Authorities from Hull, the East Riding, North and North East Lincolnshire. Cultural Collisions rotates its chair every 2 years, with the post currently held by Middle Child Artistic Director Paul Smith.

Members

- Absolutely Cultured
- ARCADE
- Artlink
- Back To Ours
- Culture House
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Freedom Festival Arts Trust
- Hull City Council
- Hull Culture & Leisure
- Hull Music Service
- Hull Truck Theatre
- Junction Goole
- Middle Child
- North East Lincolnshire Council
- North Lincolnshire Council
- The Warren Youth Project





A MESSAGE

Hello reader,

FROM PAUL

Paul here – Artistic director of Middle Child and Chair of Cultural Collisions.

Thanks for checking out this response document to our recent event, Sounding Board. The aim of the day was to bring freelancers and arts and culture workers together to think about the future. It's our first time doing something like this so it only felt right that we do some deep thinking about what worked, what could be done better, and where it all should lead. With this in mind we've paid three brilliant freelancers from across disciplines to share their unfiltered, uncensored thoughts from the day. It's important that those in receipt of public funding make space for the freelancers we rely on to have their say, and I'm delighted to share these responses with that in mind. I'm keen to ensure that I and we learn from the wisdom they've shared while also acknowledging the significant challenges our organisations face, in the hope we can move forward together to build a stronger cultural sector for our region.

Whether you were in attendance or not, I hope you find them useful. If you'd like to continue the conversation, drop me an email at paul@middlechildtheatre.co.uk.



Event Summary

THE THREE THEMES OF THE DAY

MAKING ART

In the midst of constant fundraising, job-hunting and reporting, it's easy to lose sight of what we're all here for: **Making Art**. We carved out time to reflect on what it means to make art, why we do it, and how our region can better support us to do so.

MAKING ART HAPPEN

We all know that art doesn't just happen. Like the gliding swan, there is a lot of frantic kicking beneath the surface. The second theme we explored was what it takes to make art happen, and how we can strengthen the tools, systems and support that bring creativity to life across our region.

MAKING ART ACCESSIBLE

Barriers to engaging with the arts are well documented – from geographical and social to financial and physical. Our third theme explored how we can make culture in our region genuinely accessible, inviting discussion on what's working, what isn't, how we can ensure art is truly open to all.



Writer's Responses

Sounding Board reflection

Reflection on Cultural Collisions:
Sounding Board

I've been asked, and paid, to write a reflection piece on the Cultural Collisions event Sounding Board, where arts organisations and freelancers across the region came together to discuss and listen. Now, as a tired Negative Nelly freelancer, I'm dubious. As I sit listening to the welcome address I can't help but feel myself fill with scepticism. *Things won't change. Things can't change. Not on a large scale. Not for me. Not for freelancers.* But we're asked to look forward, that freelancers are at the heart of the conversation today, we're in the room where it happens. Side note: we're never in the room where it happens, we're usually three buses away, so this isn't a small thing. Today we're here. Which means, if I open up a bit, leave Neggy Nell

By **Ellen Brammar**

in the loo, maybe something will happen? Maybe something positive could come out of this for everyone, arts organisations and freelancers?

And there are moments. There are moments where I truly feel a little buoyed up, a little less dubious. The day is full of interesting, warm humans who speak passionately about their work. But there are also moments where I feel lost in arts organisation lingo, where I suddenly feel like an interloper. Perhaps I'm not meant to be here? In one break out session my fellow participants are all so positive. They speak of art in such beautiful ways, how much it means to them, how it sustains them. And this is the purpose of today, right? To collectively agree how important our sector is, what it does for us and our society? And I agree with it all, but I don't feel it. So, I pretend. I say all the things I'm meant to say and hope no one notices that I'm faking.

After the session, a group of freelancers huddle together on the street corner, my eyes dart to theirs as I furtively whisper: *I just lied*. And another voice whispers back: *So did I*. What is wrong with us? What's wrong with me? Why did I feel the need to cover up my insecurities about my job? Another freelancer was braver and in answer to the question 'How would you feel if you didn't make



art' they replied: happier. Shit. But I get it. Because being a freelancer is almost impossible. Perhaps I wasn't truthful because I want arts organisations to let us back in the room and they're not going to do that if all we do is complain? No one needs a Negs Nelly constantly telling them that they're not doing enough. And freelancers probably don't know the half of it when it comes to the stress and pressure of running an organisation. The thought of being responsible for making sure everyone gets paid brings me out in a cold sweat. You're all incredible. And you carry a lot on your shoulders. All I carry is my work. Whether it's any good. Whether it will quietly change the world. Whether people will laugh. Whether anyone's going to hire me ever again. Whether I can afford for my kid to do gymnastics. And ah shit. I'm here. At the point where I can't not mention what we were asked not to mention in the room. Money. Because as a freelancer it's always a part of us. Whether you believe you don't need to be paid for your art because you're just starting out (mate, you should be paid for it,) or you despair that after fifteen years in your industry you still can't earn enough for your toddler to get the full 30 hours free childcare (that's me by the way, very specific,) freelancers think about it. Money money money. Because sometimes our bank accounts go down to £20 (another freelancer at the event) and life gets really scary, and all we can do is hope that the work starts coming



in again. That the organisations remember us, remember we're talented and good to work with, that we're positive (gulp) and radical. We rely on you. And you rely on us. Without us there is no art. No plays. No music. No facilitators. We get the job done. We get the job done well.

It's not an Us versus Them thing. It's not. I'm sorry if I sound bitter, or petty, or ungrateful. I'm not. There were some proper beautiful humans in that room, doing their best, listening. And I know from personal experience that there are Cultural Collisions organisations that go above and beyond for us freelancers, and I thank them. But it's really hard to be a freelancer at the moment. And if you value us (which I believe you do) then something radical needs to happen to keep us. Radical. This word came up a few times on the day. Thank goodness it did. Because it's needed, right? Radical ideas. Radical ways of doing things so that we can make radical work. We can't keep it the same and hope for the best, that's not going to cut it. And being radical isn't easy, I'm about as radical as a chocolate malted milk. But I



believe that changing a few things for freelancers might make a huge difference to us all: freelancers, organisations and the public. Here's a few ideas:

1. Build us into funding bids.

Don't only hire us on projects, think outside the box. How can you develop us? How can we develop you? How can freelancers develop freelancers? It'll make the art better. Look at what organisations with inbuilt freelancer support do and shamelessly copy them. (If your freelancers are professionals you need to pay them for development.)

2. Have a Cultural Collisions meeting entitled 'How we retain our Freelancers.'

And pay freelancers to come and talk to you, don't assume you know what it's like, even if you used to be a freelancer it's easy to forget.

3. A 'get shit done' freelancer pot of money.

All NPO's in the region share a pot of money that could be used to pay freelancers for things that will help freelancers.

4. Make more work.

Imagine a local art scene where culture is bloody everywhere, high quality, radical art. Art that means something. Where freelancers thrive at all stages of their careers. Where they are supported to take

risks. Where they can feel financially secure. Imagine that! And, yes, I know it all comes down to money, but this is a radical hope. And it would be fucking fantastic.

I know more radical thinkers than me will be able to come up with far superior ideas of how to retain freelancers (and I don't know nearly enough about what is happening in our region to confidently say that some of these aren't already a thing.) But I fervently believe that it's vital for the arts sector that we start acting now to keep our freelancers. These aren't things that were talked about on the day, I didn't raise my hand and announce to the room I was feeling dubious, it didn't feel in the spirit. But I felt it. Which is why I've reflected on it, because this is what filled my head after the event. This was all I could think about in the days after. These are the conversations I had with other freelancers. These are the things that make me cry. Because in all honesty, and this is hard for me to admit, but I don't know how much longer I'll be able to stay in this career. It's too hard. And I think I can make a bigger difference elsewhere. I can be more radical somewhere else. But there are so many brilliant freelancers that are more resilient than me, that are fighting to make it work in this sector. So, come together again. Listen. Pay them. And be radical.



Ellen is a Hull-based writer. She has had two plays produced by Middle Child, I Hate Alone and Modest. The latter toured the country and closed at the Kiln Theatre in London in 2023. She was one of BBC's Northern Voices in 2020, where she turned I Hate Alone into a TV pilot. Ellen has also developed work at Hull Truck Theatre's Be our Guest initiative and was one of the 70-minute commissioned writers at last years Fresh Ink Festival.

Sounding Board for Cultural Collisions Reflection

(plus Suggestion Box)

By Michelle Dee

Sounding Board featured presentations from across the region, expert panels and focused breakout sessions, attended by organisations and people from various levels of creative industry incl. new graduates, freelance artists, project leaders and organisational heads in attendance. An engaging day of knowledge sharing, advocacy, networking, partnership building putting freelancers at the heart, supporting them to connect with Arts organisations strengthening regional links.

Cultural Collisions set up Sounding Board as an advocacy and support network, with a particular focus on creating more high-quality National Portfolio Organisations in the region. In simple terms NPO status means you are a funded organisation for a given number of years, which allows you to think proactively about longer term strategy, longitudinal projects; future aspirations rather than always in a state of precariousness, responding one year to the next. The number of NPO's regionally is growing but compared to other areas we are not doing as well as we might.

Presentation One: An inspirational story from Sophie Drury-Bradey and Rach Drew from ARCADE. They described how they had gone from

meeting on a bench during 2020 overlooking South Bay to in 2025 taking their annual project 'Grue' – artist-led, community built, family oriented, walk-in fantasy cardboard worlds – to be part of City of Culture Bradford 2025. In that time ARCADE have run 52 projects, working with 425 lead artists. Theirs is a story rooted in the communities and schools they work in that shows real growth and development, how the lives of 'everyday' folk are changed through the participation in meaningful arts projects.

Presentation Two: Charlotte Bowen from The Culture House spoke about how her area was viewed as not having an art offer and having little interest in art, stating 'We are culturally interested just like any other'. Charlotte spoke of Mural projects made possible through the Cultural Development Fund 'Giving the chance to local artists to shine', (featured recently on BBC Look North). The impact of Gaia the illuminated earth installation, increasing feelings of people's pride in where they live, and the great potential for new projects that support the emerging Renewable Industry story of the area.

Presentation Three: Dan Watts from





Elephant in the Room on Making Art Accessible. Stand out point: making an event accessible for differently abled people never hurt the enjoyment of the able bodied. Dan explained there is still a fear around asking questions and a tendency to assume. Dan's work including writing reports and advising events and orgs including BBC's Strictly Come Dancing, Absolutely Cultured, Back To Ours, Big Malarkey and steering the Disability Arts Network, has broadened the understanding of what accessible means and highlighted the work still needed to be done. He spoke of the importance of accessibility being built in from the start, at project design stage not 'Bolted on' at the end. He concluded that we should all adopt a more radical and rebellious approach to making art and making art accessible for all.

Meeting Communities Where They Are: Tina Shuker-Abell from Junction Goole used the phrase 'a face not a poster' to describe how vital it is that artists reaching out to new groups should consider embedding themselves in new areas, and for that time to be built in to and financed at the project design stage.

She described familiarising herself with community hubs and coffee mornings, immersing herself in a place, in order to meet the people who would eventually become her Musical Theatre Group in Pontefract. She didn't just rely on a poster stuck on a notice board hoping for the

best, only to be left wondering when take-up was low.

Panels: The Panels sessions worked better when they were more structured with provocations from a host. The sessions led by one person who asked difficult questions right off the bat, resulted in a more interesting and detailed discussion. Example Anastasiia Manina freelance writer from the Ukraine explaining who gets to tell what story and when. She talked about the use of symbols to reach audiences who have no experience of what it means to live in a war zone. This session didn't treat the panellists or the audience like novices and allowed for conversation through a more dynamic lens.

Resilience: Resilience became a key takeaway: an artist need to rethink, pivot work in new directions when faced with obstacles. Example: abandoning a planned music session and facilitating an exchange about life stories. Artists receive rejections continuously, it's part and parcel of being an artist: rejection emails after callouts, refusals for funding, red tape and glacial thinking.

Proposals from organisations are likely to be looked upon more favourably, than ones proposed by freelancers. Why? Better opportunities for scope and longevity for instance and do more with the money get more measurables from the fund.

Freelancers are doing multiple roles that in an organisation might be done by a whole team.

Freelance Artists may spend three quarters of their life chasing funds and whatever part is left actually creating art. Freelancers are admin/promoters/bid writers/budgeters/logistics experts/policy aware and then an artist.

Some organisations will remunerate steps in their applications for new projects recognising the support freelancers need to apply: a fee for attending a pitch meeting or candidate activity. This kind of freelancer-centered approach should become standard.

Making Art Accessible: Siddi Majubah hosting the Making Art Accessible break out described how some members of the diaspora did not feel able to be in certain spaces. He spoke about a project he ran from Hull Truck Theatre where his participants were nervous about entering the theatre. He suggested a 'laid-back' approach from some of his fellow West-Africans meaning you have to go to where they already are.

Siddi also recognised that it is vital for artists from the diaspora to get up, be courageous and curious. He talked about how when he first arrived from Sierra Leone he asked security at Hull Truck for access to the wifi. Today that security guard greets Siddi Majubah, as the person working at the theatre, delivering the projects.

Siddi has become the perfect arts ambassador for diasporic communities, and a conduit between Open Doors refugee organisation, and 87 Gallery on Princes Avenue, informing the development of artist programmes.

Using art to connect and foster integration and understanding between communities is exemplified by Cecil Jones from Open Doors who facilitates multicultural music sessions, with lots of different instruments, within schools. It's a chance to change the perception that refugees are just poor and unfortunate people. Siddi and Cecil recall working on projects with Gary Hammond percussionist for The Beautiful South: another example of facilitators, freelancers, outside agencies and arts organisations all working in harmony for the betterment of society.

Max May of HEY Creative whilst discussing minority groups stated tokenism is not enough to break down barriers to participation. It's not enough to fly a rainbow flag in the window for instance and think job done. Inclusion should be built in at project design stage and organisations should maintain a clear and visible stance on policies, procedures and amenities. Middle Child playwright Maureen Lennon spoke about how she had thought their Brexit play was about a single moment in our history, rather than what it became a catalyst for the start of something ongoing: namely the divided society and culture wars.

Two artists spoke about how they experienced being an artist and a mother, describing a feeling of losing themselves and a struggle to come back into the industry. Also



how they found motherhood shifted how they thought creatively, how in a certain way being a mother allowed them to care about their art in a different way.

A point echoed by Jo artist and carer, who recognised her own shift in thinking recalling how, when all the organisational structures vanished along with all their corresponding measures of success, she no longer felt the compulsion to compare herself to the other professionals. She too found a way to care differently about her practice, a different kind of intensity, adding it helps to have the lines clearly marked.

Funding: A number of times throughout the day, in different settings, there were calls for change around access to funding. In that it is still too outcome oriented. There is clear frustration with the over emphasis on funders gathering huge amounts of data, which the artists have to research when bid writing, and then again for evaluation and surveys. There must be a better way, a way that feels less cynical. A radical move would be to not have such rigid projects where everything is mapped out to the nth degree beforehand, but to allow a project to find its feet, room to change direction, experimentation if need be.

To get back to process not product.

With the emphasis on speaking in 'draft form' today could we also explore applying that same draft form to project design?

The value and benefits of partnering organisations already working with communities was discussed. The importance of partner building between family groups, community centres, those who meet specific groups at the 'coal face' to encourage better knowledge sharing.

There was a definite feeling in the room, reiterated by Paul Smith of Middle Child, that artists and organisations should be working together not against each other, to make projects, partnerships work better for each other.

A call this time for collective pressure, freelance and organisational, to be put on funding bodies including Arts Council England (ACE) to move away from their tick box, numbers driven funding models.

Negative to Positive: A story of resilience from choreographer Jo Ashbridge: upon experiencing all the privations of the pandemic she turned all the negatives into positives, to use the barriers to drive and inform her dance making. Social distancing, buildings going dark, meant she had to have a radical shift in the way she made work. Cutting out the middleman, the organisations and the gatekeepers, she and Tamar Draper had complete artistic freedom. What once were barriers became cornerstones, informing choreography and working practices, presentation, and the core





values of the Tamar & Jo Dance Company. By not putting everything online as many organisations experimented with, she created Doorstep Dances. Literally dancing on strangers' doorsteps, providing joy-filled moments in someone's day, with bright ingenious costumes and world leading choreography via mentorship from leading names in dance.

People could choose from a jukebox of dances: a Donna Summer number in a disco outfit, or Ace of Spades with all the rock bravado and theatre a heavy metal anthem demands, all beautifully presented in the language of contemporary dance.

It put dance back in the community, literally in the street. From Orchard Park to the Avenues, East Hull to Hedon the two of them grew their company all by themselves, all the while maintaining all the government rules.

Through a series of ever more ambitious expansive projects they changed the way people think about dance, how people engage with dance, the value of 'community dance' – a divisive term, not favoured in the dance world. Tamar and Jo Dance Company exemplify today's main themes, importance of meeting communities where they are, pivoting to meet specific needs, resilience, perseverance, seeing opportunities rather than barriers, and yet despite creating projects, programmes and partnerships that enrich lives directly, they have

struggled to access funding pots in the city.

With a cast of 60 dancers 8 to 68yrs for Sync or Swim presented at Freedom Festival '24 the two artists produced a half hour long show with detailed, rich choreography, that felt relevant, while maintaining that standard of quality. Their most ambitious show to date had the best numbers of any act, homegrown or International, with people seeing it in their thousands. Not only did they see it but each audience joined in at the end, breaking down yet more barriers. And, they achieved all of this on a shoestring budget.

Dancers, particularly those who work with non-professional dancers, have a way to go before they are recognised and valued in the same way other artists seem to be.

Each One Teach One: Another great example of a homegrown project, directly changing lives, reaching those 'harder to reach communities with low arts engagement' is the Beats Bus. A grassroots project that is literally a travelling recording studio inside a bus. Run by Steve Arnott and Nigel 'Kobby' Taylor, the Beats Bus drives out to places across the region and parks up on estates, in town centres, municipal parks, community hubs, wherever they can fit a full-length bus. Young people are encouraged to come onboard, have a go at some rapping, play with microphones, do some MCing, mixing records,

workshops, take a masterclass in DJing and music production with paid for professionals: employing freelance musicians, building partnerships with organisations and connecting with young people on their terms, in their manor. It's hands on direct intervention, the young people sit down and learn to write their own bars/rhymes and maybe while doing that they begin to open up about their feelings, talk about the place they live, their families, their culture: Beats Bus gives them a voice and maybe a future.

And it's not about turning all of them into hip hop artists. Just that one meeting, that one connection might be enough to influence a young person to find their path in life. We are reminded that we all have that one meeting, a crucial intervention be it a teacher or project leader: someone that saw somewhere in us years ago. A pivotal person who showed us respect; believed in us, gave us validation; someone we remember who said, 'Hey there I see you.'

The kind of intervention that can change a person's whole outlook. Nigel shared a transformational story about a young person called Frankie who at thirteen came to them just wanting to rap. Today after regular attendance of Beat Bus sessions, Frankie is able to put a bit of money on the table and begin to support his family – a mark of self-respect – as he develops a career

as a DJ, attracting promoters and getting paid gigs.

'Each One, Teach One' Nigel says introducing the tenet at the core of the Hip Hop world. Every person you teach, they must go on and teach another: skills and knowledge sharing. Nigel asked about how the same approach could be applied to other sectors of the creative industry, to move away from the siloing and gatekeeping of skills and information.

A point reinforced by a call for lists / databases to be made available containing venue information so that groups might find a space that meets their needs.

Finally a summing up statement addressing everyone from Emily, the new Gallery Assistant at Artlink 87 Gallery, which delivers a strong sense of hope for the future.

'As a young person in the creative arts, today made me feel inspired and proud to know that so many people care so strongly about the arts, and to talk about and bring light to the struggles within the arts. It's been amazing to hear and see everyone's passion to make the creative sector for not only young people but all ages and abilities even stronger.'



Michelle Dee is a freelance artist with a writing and journalistic background who has collaborated with visual artists, to create performance works that are often surreal and colourful. Her writing and research background comes in useful when extracting left field characters from history, giving them a voice and bringing them to life. Michelle's passion for storytelling has led to commissioned work for BBC Arts Contains Strong Language, The Verb, Apples and Snakes, City Arts Hull. culturemarathon.com



Suggestions Box

At the close of the day a point came from the floor that the discussions only began to get to the 'knotty' arguments at the end of the allotted time. With a varied programme of speakers from different regions and specialisms as well as more focused break-out sessions, there was simply never going to be enough time.

We have an amazing eco-system, it's important to celebrate that. I say we can celebrate that and support it to flourish by attending other peoples' events even when it's not your 'thing'.

For working parties and specialist groups to be set up to target particular areas where progress is needed, be that access or policy models.

A discussion to be had about the AI threat versus its potential benefits.

Like the aforementioned database of venues, to avoid the territorial approach to information, a call for a directory of all those groups and individuals who attended today. This is a job of work, a directory such as this would need to be updated and there might be security concerns attached.

A call for authenticity when discussing world events in terms of use of specific language.

We Are Creative's representative Rupert Creed suggested an art prize be devised that celebrated freelancers in distinct areas of expertise. He also announced a forthcoming policy report and the launch of a mentoring scheme for freelancers.

Cultural Collisions the group, to be used to serve the entire region to be a champion for freelancer rights, organisational struggles, to find ways to feed into existing projects advocacy strategies, to exemplify best practice by learning and sharing knowledge, and growing the chances of creating more high quality NPO's in the region. To be a weapon for freelancers, an advocate for freelancers, to support the work towards long term change.

A request that applications be far more responsive to the people who are actually delivering the work.

Calls for more meet-ups in order to measure progress – repeatedly pointed out that we don't want to be turning up next year and finding that nothing has changed.

Responding to a point about how the day had been set up to have freelancers at its heart, a salient reminder that without the next generation we really are in trouble. The amount of young adults/graduates at the event today is heartening.

A call for a Creative Parliament that has an impact on decisions in the industry.

A warning against too many mailing lists and groups leading to overwhelm.

Mini freedom centres around the city to be a rolling programme of showcases for freelancers to display skills and be celebrated. A show and tell for adults.

The Herd theatre co. put out a callout for artists to join with them as they continue meeting the needs of younger audiences children aged 0 – 7 year olds.

A call for more opportunities for freelancers so that they can stay in the area.

A drive to create art specifically to be seen in public spaces in a move to get away from buildings. A large-scale public artwork with multiple groups involved.

Open access and more transparency when it comes to opportunities, open calls and better signposting.

A call for someone to come and run Beverley Puppet Festival.
A scratch night for new performance work, that aspect of our theatre offer has fallen away somewhat, never picked up again post pandemic perhaps.

A cover-all pass that allows for access to a range of events from our cultural offer every year. Other payment and ticketing relationships to be included with charity-led or cause led donations in place of ticketing. More spaces experimenting outside traditional models.

Writer's Responses

Sounding Board reflection

By Jodie Langford

A sea of subcultures flooded Social on Tuesday 14th October 2025. Grievances of the past were left at the door, leaving room to explore what the future may hold for arts and culture across the region. I had a feeling that this wouldn't be your typical 'conference' where power dynamics and titles create a divide between panellist and attendee. This room felt balanced and inviting.

An enchanting energy washed over me as Sophie & Rach from ARCADE spoke of GRUE, an immersive art experience built by the community. I was transported back to the innocent wonder and excitement I once had as a kid, creating fantasy worlds out of scraps and packaging on my living room floor. ARCADE's origin story is unique, however their practice is something I'm very familiar with. The key takeaways for me were that shared experiences

can lead to something beautiful, meet people where they're at and empower people to own their story.

So, why do we even make art anyway? Charlotte Bowen answered this in three points; because there's a need, because there's not enough and BECAUSE WE WANT TO!

I have eight words for you... purple-victoria-sponge-cake-with-chilli-in-it. Taken from Dan Watts when talking about embracing the rebellious spirit of art in his talk Making Art Accessible. I found Dan captivating from start to finish, through scattered images of his younger self to him poetically speaking of 'open minds appreciating the beautiful colour of humanity.'



This led nicely into discussions around holding bravery. I do agree that we are brave in the sense that we have had to fight to be seen, be heard and we tackle everything with a DIY spirit. However, could we be more radical? The answer is yes. I believe there is still a fear of people speaking up about atrocities, genocide and anything political. For us to move forward culturally we must do more to address this.

There is also still an imbalance in relation to who gets a seat at the table with the big dogs, a topic we discussed in a Making Art Happen breakout session facilitated by Phil Hargreaves. We need to make sure that we share and expand our networks and empower people to step up. Gone are the times of gatekeeping opportunities.

On a lighter note, Andy Ross stole the show at the start of the next Q+A with their comedic microphone routine. You really did just have to be there... sorry. Let it be known that I do relish in life's clumsiness. The invitation to speak in draft form intertwined with instances of humour and human nature is what made this occasion even more comforting for me. Jargon, complex language and formalities are instant

ways to scare me off and reinforce the feeling of being an imposter in the art world.

This barrier was discussed in the panel – Young People In The Arts. So, how do we make sure young people get opportunities in the arts? It was suggested that it is important for young people to be around creatives. If you see it, you're a lot more likely to believe it. Also mentioned was that we must value young people in the present moment, exactly as they are. Simply listen to help them realise that their story is worth telling and throw away the belief that childhood is a rehearsal for adulthood.

Boom, mic drop (sorry Andy). This was refreshing to hear after years of listening to people repeatedly use the empty phrase 'young people are the future.' I am genuinely intrigued as to what people think that means, I certainly have no idea.

We can't predict the future, but we have a choice in how we respond to uncertainty. Jo Ashbridge offered insight into this in her Making Art session. I found Tamar and Jo's response to the restraints of COVID-19 an inspiring story for anyone who is feeling beaten down



over unsettling thoughts of what might be coming our way. When obstacles are thrown at you, you can think or you can do and the middleman is you.

Here are my final thoughts....

It is very clear that many of us share the same values, I want to know what we are so afraid of confronting?

Are people actually aware of what they want to challenge creatively and are they also aware of what challenges them?

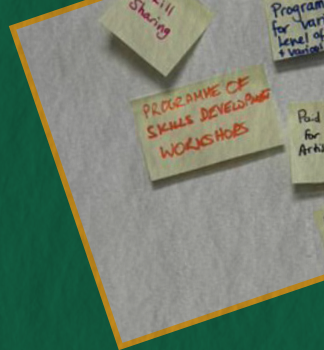
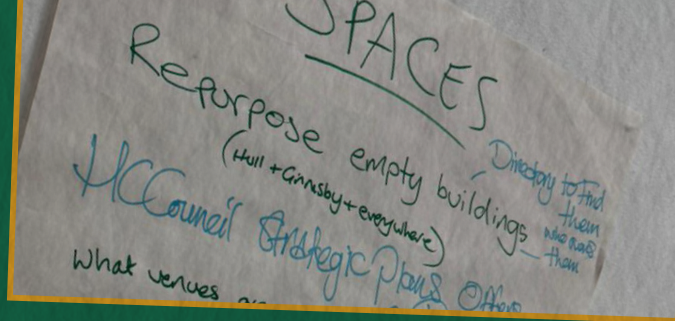
How do we create an environment where we feel safe to sink below the surface and deepen our conversations?

We are proud of our community and we are confident that we have established meaningful connections through culture and creativity. Yet, many of us find it hard to shake that humble northern attitude.

It's time to get loud. The Humber has a big ol' fire in its belly, let's make it an inferno.

Jodie Langford is a writer, spoken word artist, and performer from Hull with a decade of experience in both writing and performing. She regularly collaborates with Hull's 'King of Electro' producer, Endoflevelbaddie. Together, they merge her poetic-punk lyricism with a mashup of dancefloor flavours, ranging from electro rhythms to DnB beats. When she's not shouting at people on stage, Jodie is a Creative Project Facilitator at The Warren Youth Project, where she helps empower young people to express themselves creatively.





So, what next?

This is always the key question. Days like this are great for stimulating discussion and highlighting what's wrong, but how do we turn it into action?

Firstly, some of that is up to Cultural Collisions and its members – both as a collective and through our individual programmes of work. I know we've all come away with a refreshed perspective on the opportunities and challenges we face in Hull, and that knowledge will no doubt inform our future programmes. It's also something we'll come back to as a group – unpicking survey responses, post-it note ideas (pictured), conversations on the day, and the thoughtful pieces above to plan our next steps together. We'll use these methods of feedback to understand if there is an appetite for Sounding Board 2, or a natural evolution of the form.

Secondly, I was delighted to hear so many people on the day say that they had missed this kind of connection, increasingly rare since the pandemic. There was a real sense in the room that this was a positive step forward and that we should be having these kind of in-person conversations more regularly – both exploratory and action-focused.

Thirdly – and perhaps most importantly – I'm excited to see what other initiatives come out of the day from the freelancers and theatreworkers in attendance. I was pleased to see there's already a planned assembly in January to talk in detail about 'Art In A Time of Genocide', following on from a question asked in one of the day's panels – arguably the most pressing issue of our time. I'll



be keeping my eyes peeled to see what else happens as a result of new networks and ideas formed at Sounding Board.

It's impossible to sum up everything that will happen as a result of coming together at Sounding Board so soon after the event, but I know for sure there's lots of goodwill around at present and a desire to make things better for both organisations and freelancers, despite the (very different) challenges we all face.

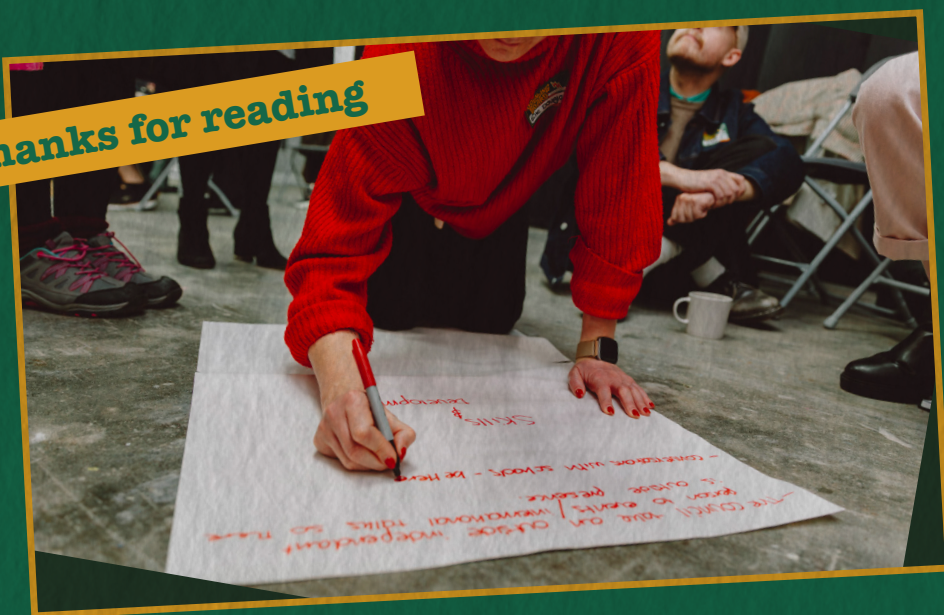
If you'd like to continue the conversation, please reach out to me on paul@middlechildtheatre.co.uk, and keep your eyes peeled for more to come.

Thanks for reading,



Paul Smith
Chair - Cultural Collisions
Artistic Director & CEO - Middle Child

Thanks for reading



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Marketing Manager
Alice Beaumont

Design
Jessica Zschorn
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Stage Manager
Andy Ross

Front of House Manager
Lulu Frenett

BSL interpreters
Dave Wycherley
& Karen Mettam

Event Photography
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Credits



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