Figure 1: Cast members in Spring Awakening (Marcus, 2016)

*Disability Aesthetic: An analysis of how theatre design is adapted to actors and audience members with disabilities.*

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Acknowledgements:

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Introduction:

"My interest at this time was not so much to learn how they got their impairments as it was in finding out how they felt being persons with disability in a culture that did not speak about disability as such." (Quayson, 2007). This quote, among other personal experiences, has catalysed this dissertation. When pondering the representation of disability in current culture, an obvious source of research is within the creative industry, where current affairs can be recorded in literature, artwork and theatre. Petra Kuppers describes theatre as a means of reflecting on how we understand ourselves in our relative political position, allowing the opportunity to observe how we see ourselves in society from a third-person perspective, by demonstrating everyday interactions with people and within spaces (Kuppers, 2017). For this reason, the lack of representation of disability within theatre marks dishonesty within our culture, removing a minority from history by refusing to represent them truthfully, by either choosing to represent disabled bodies with able bodies or merely refusing to represent them at all. Christopher Shinn has highlighted the issue of non-disabled actors playing disabled characters stating "the curtain call where the actor sheds her disability for our applause—they enable the lie of representation. The real freaks are somewhere else, still waiting for their own show." (Shinn, 2014).

Contemporary designers must consider what power design has in improving the standard of inclusivity within theatre spaces. This dissertation aims to examine contemporary western theatre venues to see how they are engaged in accessible and inclusive design. It also aims to identify the issues and challenges experienced by disabled minority groups of actors and audience members. The research methodology adopted contains responses to existing research in the field that engages with disability discourse and arguments that balance models of disability. For example, social and medical. The social model is significant because it speaks to the environment and how it needs to change rather than a medical approach which lays blame on the disabled person (Gibson, 2015). The inclusion of interviews conducted with disability advocates within the theatre industry, such as representatives of theatre companies, will give this dissertation insight into the back of house facilities necessary for accessible opportunities for disabled actors. Their insight providing evidence for evaluations of recent iconic theatre redevelopments. This dissertation will also contain insight from advocates in the disabled community who experience theatre as audience members, to provide a perspective of the journey within a theatre as a disabled attendee. This qualitative data is useful research to contribute to the analysis of theatre accessibility because including disabled peoples input in future contemporary theatre projects can highlight accessibility obstacles and opportunities from the beginning of the design process. Therefore, addressing these elements within

the design earlier will begin dissolving the barrier between able-bodied design and adaptations to cater to disability.

The following chapters contain case studies of three large commercial theatres in the UK. The chapters address the historical context of the theatres to identify why requirements for disabled people were overlooked. All the theatres chosen to research have since undergone a redevelopment by current architects/designers. This dissertation will analyse the design process that underwent and where it would have been beneficial for a disability advocate's input—comparing analysis of the theatres' facilities suggesting how the individual theatre can improve using another as a precedent.

Case study 1: Leeds Playhouse, West Yorkshire.

The Leeds Playhouse has made significant contributions to theatre inclusivity. The theatre was campaigned for by a newly formed committee who wanted to address the absence of a regional theatre within West Yorkshire (Leeds Playhouse, s.f.). On the 5th May 1968 twelve hundred people crowded in front of Leeds Town Hall to create a producing theatre, and despite economic difficulties at the time, £20,000 was raised from public funding alone. The committee opted to find a temporary site for the theatre to cut costs. It was offered a site rent-free at the top of Calverley Street from the University of Leeds – on the condition that in 10 years the theatre would be transformed into a sports hall (Leeds Playhouse, s.f.). Bill Houghton-Evans was the theatre architect and was tasked with keeping the costs down while fitting the theatre in the rectangular-shaped exterior that was promised for the future sports hall (team, 2003). The interior also had to be able to be relocated to its new site.

The theatre was built similarly to a Greek Amphitheatre, with a thrust stage to blur the barrier between actors and audience. Entrances to the stage were on a high and low level and the foyer, cloakroom and bar were positioned below the raked seating. It can be noted from the photograph of the exterior shell (Figure 2) compared to the auditorium's finished interior (Figure 3) that the form of the exterior and interior are entirely different. As the auditorium's raked seating is confined to the "box" for the sports hall, the seating angle becomes very steep, begging the question of how patrons with mobility limitations would access the higher tiers of seating. During the 1960s, the social model of disability made society rethink the responsibility placed on the disabled person instead of designing the environment to be accessible to them (Rembis, 29 Oct 2019). As the theatre was

nearing the end of its ten-year lifespan in 1978 (Hutchinson, 2020), a petition gained 30,000 signatures as a part of the "Leeds needs a Playhouse" campaign.


Figure 2: Leeds Playhouse starting construction (Leeds City Council, 2003)

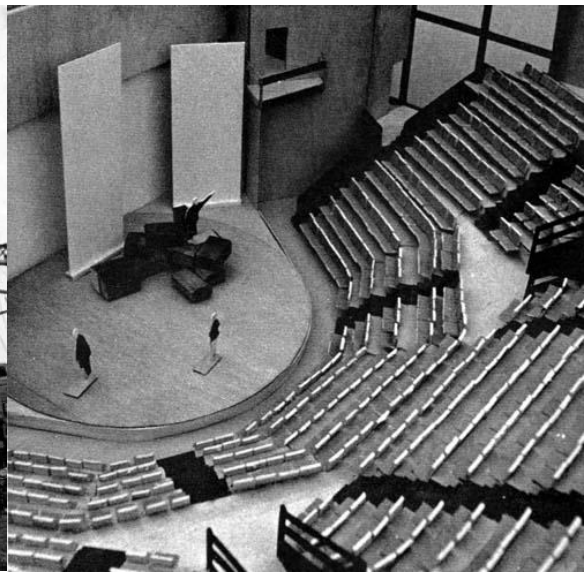

Figure 3: Leeds Playhouse, Stage completed (Leeds City Council, 2003)

In 1984, the Leeds Theatre a permanent site was found by the Leeds City Council on Quarry Hill. For the new permanent West Yorkshire Playhouse, Architects from the Appleton Partnership were chosen to design the theatre, after winning a national design competition. Ian Appleton, the architect who designed the Playhouse, had a portfolio full of theatre design and was well renowned in the field (Webster, 2020). This section of the dissertation will analyse and compare the Playhouse's original design by Ian Appleton, and the 2016 Redevelopment underwent by Architects Page/Park. An original interview with Peter Ruthven Hall from CharcoalBlue (Theatre Accessibility Consultants) will also offer insight into accessible theatre space guidelines.

The West Yorkshire Playhouse has two auditoriums, the Quarry Theatre and the Courtyard Theatre, with a combined capacity of one thousand one hundred. The larger auditorium, the Quarry, was designed with a 90-degree fan seating layout on a single level. It follows an open stage format without a proscenium (Appleton, 2008). As the stage is on a higher level, it poses an obstacle to actors using wheelchairs or with visual impairments. Although the side stages (behind walls on both sides of the stage) are spacious, confusion caused by the storage of props and scenery and a lack of clear circulation could also be a hazard to actors with visual impairments.

The Quarry is an example of a theatre prominently used for drama productions but offers a multipurpose format, allowing workshops, lectures and presentations. Possible because of the two rows of shallow balconies to allow for more seating and the lower levels of seating being formed by bleachers off a flat floor, they can be removed if additional floor space is needed. (Appleton, 2008) This increased flexibility, although perhaps unintentionally, allows for increased flexibility in accommodating for patrons with disabilities. The bleacher seating is inaccessible to audience members who use wheelchairs (as the only way to access their seats unless they are on the lowest row is up a stairway either side of the bleachers, then presented with the obstacle of accessing their seating in the horizontal rows). However, the increased floor space allows for participation on an intimate level, either in workshops or in drama productions. However, this inclusion level is not extended to technicians with disabilities as the theatre's technical level (lighting, sound) is higher within the building with no exact access route.

While the auditorium needs to be universally accessible to all patrons, it is not the whole story when one enters a theatre. The entrance is inviting the public inside to the box office where one picks up one ticket and the bar/foyer where one waits before the show starts. When beginning to dissect these features from the 1992 Playhouse, the journey begins at the entrance. When describing a theatre's public entrance, there are several requirements: based on the two photographs below (Figure 4 and Figure 5); this section will analyse the most apparent features while identifying where accessibility has been considered.

Figure 4: West Yorkshire Playhouse entrance (Appleton, 2021)

Figure 5: West Yorkshire Playhouse entrance 1999 (Leeds City Council, 2003)

In the photographs, it can be noted that the external display was more illuminating at night, and from the outside patrons can see advertising for presumably the current productions and events being held in the Playhouse. Minimal advertising presents the Playhouse as more of a community

hub then commercial service, creating an inviting atmosphere to attract the community. A canopy is also provided shelter for patrons waiting outside, while also representing a gathering point for the community. However, this is achieved more effectively at night. Two lines of doors separating the foyer from outside prevent sound entering the building and protection from draught. However, sufficient space between these doors for patrons in wheelchairs is essential not to disrupt the building's circulation and isolate the patron. Automatic doors and staff supervision are other factors to respond to the needs of wheelchair patrons. Once patrons past the doors, consciously designed signage should direct them to the various facilities available to them (foyer, cloakroom, bar, bathrooms, auditorium). Seating space is provided and can be used by elderly or disabled patrons to combat exhaustion or be overwhelmed by bustling crowds. At the Playhouse there were two entrances into the building, one for pedestrians arriving from the city centre and one for entrance from the car park. It would not be unusual practice for only one of these entrances to be wheelchair accessible. (Louise, 2021)

After discussing the public areas within the then West Yorkshire Playhouse, this section will analyse the only rehearsal room. The Playhouse's rehearsal room is in the same building as the main auditorium, allowing for more comfortable transport of scenery and props. The journey is also made more comfortable for actors with and without disabilities as they can access the stage with more ease, then if the rehearsal space was on a different level. The rehearsal space also had a high ceiling, probably for storage of tall props for scenery, and adequate acoustics within the room, so the performer's sound does not become too loud. The rehearsal room ceiling also daylights into the room, with the option of blanking it off, allowing control of the room's lighting depending on the needs of the performance (Appleton, 2008). The rehearsal room also has a sprung floor, designed to reduce the chance of injury in dance/physical performances. These accommodations being put in place providing excellent safety and creative opportunities for the Playhouse's performances and accommodates other companies who are touring and are not familiar with the West Yorkshire Playhouse. However, it can be assumed that these requirements were considered in the original design as the main stage. The Quarry Theatre, the ground floor dressing rooms and front and back of house entry are all on the same level, making moving between them easy for performers and staff members. The Courtyard theatre could not follow the same layout as the capacity for a smaller, more intimate performance space did not require the ceilings to be as high as three metres. Therefore, the balcony seats were lower and thus, the ramps were not required to be as steep. (Ruthven Hall, 2021)

In October 2019 Page/Park completed the West Yorkshire Theatre's redevelopment, renaming it the Leeds Theatre. The redevelopment came at a time where Leeds cultural scene was growing at an exciting rate (Young, 2020). A significant element of the redesign was changing the building's orientation, which addresses the city, metaphorically and literally. The new ceramic façade facing St Peters street not only gave a new face to the organisation, but it was also in addition to a new entrance at street level (Wilson, 2020).

When discussing the requirements of theatre in comparison to other cultural venues, Peter Ruthven Hall from Charcoal Blue commented:

"… I suppose the whole point about a theatre is a closely seated community. So, you actually want to be brushing shoulders with your neighbours. And that's not always the case. But in the cinema, you tend to have enough space between you and the neighbour. You can wriggle and stretch and shake and do all sorts of things without affecting anybody. And cinema is very passive experience as a result theatre is about jostling shoulders and laughing and going; why are you reacting like that?" (Ruthven Hall, 2021)

Concerning the Leeds Playhouse, this idea was considered in the redevelopment of the Quarry Theatre, which seats 750 patrons but still creates an intimate atmosphere accessible to all its patrons.

Another redevelopment element was creating a mid-level entry for the Quarry auditorium, an obstacle in accessibility for its patrons. This new entry-level provided an opportunity to travel through the theatre and access the other areas more comfortable. The Courtyard Theatres seating capacity was increased by making the stalls shallower. Although it can be argued that in sacrificing stalls seating, options for accessibility seating may also have been reduced, a situation Shona Louise has found herself in:

"… a lot of the time as a wheelchair user, my seat is a restricted view, even the back at the stalls. And so, the dress circle cuts off the top half of the stage, which depending on the show can be a problem. And then quite often, boxes are the other option for me. … Even when I can get in, I'm getting such a worse deal than everyone else, and I'm not choosing it. If I was non-disabled, perhaps I would choose a really cheap seat and deal with a worse view. But when it's your only option, it's really alienating…" (Louise, 2021)

When implementing significant design changes in any public space, designers must consider how the existing community will react to the changes. For this reason, listening to the feedback from regular theatre attendees is essential when deciphering what changes need to be made and what elements should be reserved. In the Leeds Playhouse case, the decision was made to involve theatre design consultants from CharcoalBlue in the redevelopment. Although their expertise is accessibility, they still recognise the need for testing with the disabled community to illuminate obstacles that may others be left without being addressed. However, it is not enough to consult the disabled community when major design decisions have already been made.

"…who needs assistance and helping them through you know, if one was going to be a specialist in the theatre, one should work front of house. And you should see how people arrive at the theatre, you should watch where they trip, you know, where the carpet edging is rough. And where there's a sort of an odd level change, where there's a ramp that surprises people where something isn't lit, where the signage isn't good. And just watch how people react to these situations. Because in a few nights, you'll see all the problems. And you just need to be aware of them and then remind yourself constantly that this is this is how people are." (Ruthven Hall, 2021)

In the current social context, due to COVID-19, this idea is reinforced by the publication of The Seven Principals of Inclusive Recovery, to maintain the importance of accessibility to disabled people within the theatre industry. The third principle "Disabled people should be consulted when organisations develop bespoke operating or reopening plans and undertake Equality Impact Assessments before making decisions" (Anon., 2021) asserts the need to have discourse with the disabled community.

"…the crucible wasn't existing theatre, it's all concrete raked. So, we couldn't cut into things easily, we had to build out in front of things. And they were very difficult narrow changes, which were all nonstandard conditions, there was no sort of prescription for how he would solve them."

When considering the redevelopment of a building with long-standing heritage within the community, it should be addressed that a common opinion among designers is that requirements for accessibility are contradictory to maintaining the existing building's heritage. To deliberate this argument, this section of the case study will be comparing the thoughts of Peter Ruthven Hall: theatre consultant involved in the Leeds Playhouse, and Regan Linton: theatre director of Phamily, an American theatre company for actors with disabilities.

"I think it's a balance. I don't think you can throw away the quality of a good building just for one aspect of society. But I don't think you necessarily need to, but you have to be open to what the solutions that do work. And that make something a huge improvement on what was there before. I think actually even BS8300 still allows that in an existing building. It always used to be that if you couldn't get your 1% of wheelchair positions within an auditorium, you needed to get as many as you could in as many places as you could. But I think the 1% is the minimum and that it's the extra options and the flexibility, the things that you argue over but you're 1% minimum, I think it's the absolute, but you don't lesson." (Ruthven Hall, 2021)

"…if we didn't see accessibility as a hindrance, then we would be more engaged in saying, Okay, how do we combine these? How do we design these, like, universally inclusive and accessible spaces and also make them super badass and cool and attractive…? I think there is definitely a way to do that, but I don't usually find that in art spaces." (Linton, 2020)

In comparing the opinions of both these industry professionals, it can be observed that both perspectives do share a common interest in providing opportunities for actors and patrons with disabilities in a theatre space. From the perspective of a designer, Ruthven Hall is knowledgeable on the regulations when designing for accessibility, however, must balance these requirements with regulations allowing what changes can be done on an existing building. From the perspective of a theatre director, it can be perceived that designers claiming to wanting to challenge inaccessibility in a theatre space, may overlook the requirements of back of house accessibility, for disabled actors to be offered an opportunity to grow in their professions without alienation. The allowances for redevelopment on a listed building are less then when a building is unlisted, so with good intentions, accessibility can only be implemented as far as the law allows, suggesting the need for a re-evaluation at a government level on the balance of accessibility and heritage.

Case Study 2: The Young Vic Theatre, Waterloo.

The following case study will analyse the Young Vic Theatre's development since its commission by the National Theatre in 1969. Like the Leeds Playhouse, it was designed as a temporary theatre. The purpose of the theatres' commission was in response to the growing number of young people inhabiting Lambeth and Southwark that lived without access to essential amenities (i.e., water and indoor plumbing) and that lived in local authority housing. Suggesting that the commissioned

theatre would become a communal hub for the Cut, providing basic amenities while also increasing morale for the community by providing creative opportunities. While these intentions were pure, unknowingly to the public at the time the theatre was also a solution for the National Theatre to get rid of a portion of the enormous profit it had made during its 1967-1968 season, which was funding by the Arts Council. It can be debated whether a temporary theatre was an appropriate investment in the community in the current social context. As the theatre was designed as a temporary structure, the Young Vic's building had to be near the Old Vic so that the two could share workshop, wardrobe and rehearsal facilities (Rufford, 2008). These limitations, combined with the priority of maximising the theatre's income, can result in the overshadowing of essential accessibility requirements for the building, the result when committees of men and women are chosen who may or may not understand the arts or accessibility, but all of them understanding financial limitations. In the context of accessibility, this dialogue is where it would have been essential to include members of the disabled community, who can also view the project with financial objectivity, but less willing to compromise on inclusivity features. The extensive use of blockwork in the design scheme enforces this theory: they were the cheapest, standard material available.

Frank Dunlop, then theatre director of the Nottingham playhouse, was passionate about bringing theatre to Lambeth's youth. He believed directors were neglecting young audiences:

"[Directors] always talked about what they wanted to do," (Rosenthal, 2020)

Bill Howell, the original architect for the Young Vic, had to create a temporary theatre surrounding an existing butcher shop that had survived the World War II, which could not be demolished due to cost and its resonance within the community. Instead, it was converted into a foyer, and the theatre was built surrounding it as a series of concrete rooms. Howell designed the theatre in collaboration with the then Young Vic theatre director Frank Dunlop, offering a perspective from a theatre-maker position to an architect who previously had not worked on a theatre. Howell had originally begun designing the theatre with a degree of reusability for when the theatre company moved out after its five-year agreement. With no pressure to create an iconic building, Howell designed a theatre blended into its industrial landscape so to not intimidate the community (Rufford, 2008).

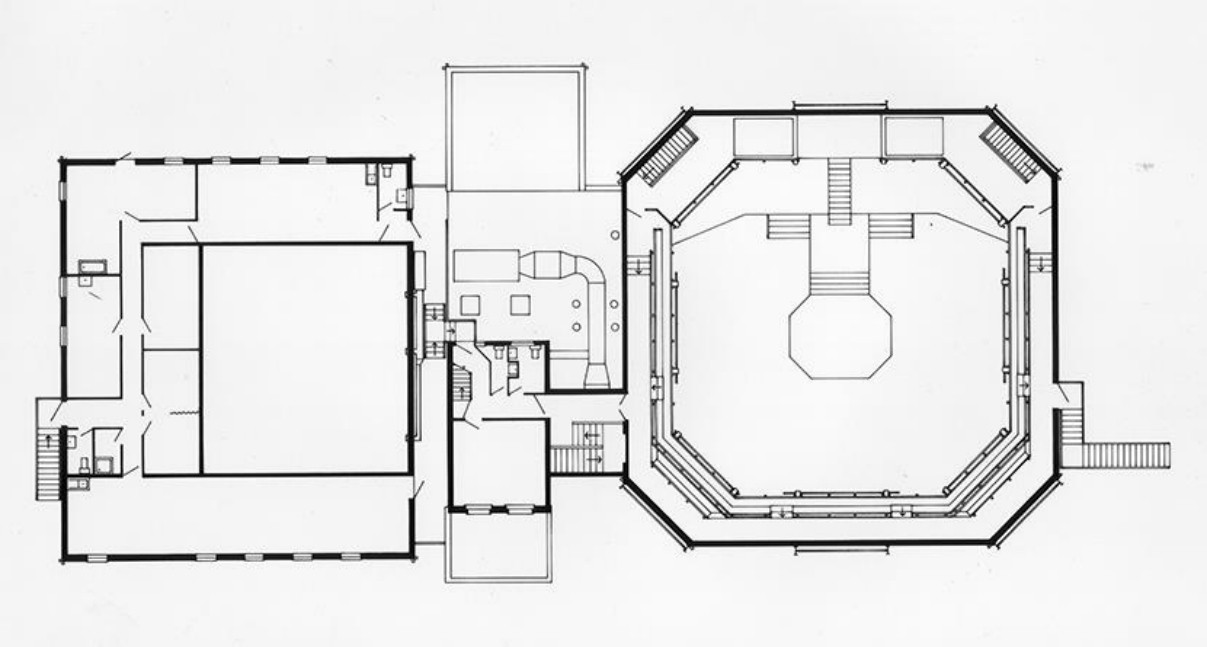

Figure 6: Young Vic ground floor plan (HKPA allsorts, 2015)

Figure 7: The Young Vic Theatre in 1970 (HPKA allsorts, 2015)

Howell designed the auditorium in an octagonal shape able to seat 450 patrons with a row of gallery seating surrounding three interior sides (Anon., 2015). The performance space was a long-thrust stage, and an ancillary block on the other side of the foyer contained a large rehearsal room, dressing rooms and a coffee bar (Anon., 2015). The existing residential building became theatre offices on the upper level (Rosenthal, 2020). Though at the time the auditorium was successful, there were significant drawbacks when put in use. Two major issues regarding its circulation: Actors or audience members could not get around the auditorium, and there were no backstage facilities (Anon., 2020). In the context of accessibility for disabled actors, these obstacles are detrimental as an actor. One is expected to manoeuvre oneself from the dressing rooms to the stage. Then somehow getting on the stage, which is on another level. Though Howell's design decisions were influenced by his mere 60,000 budget, by creating the shell of a theatre, it was made classless, and its flexibility encouraged new work created by the community (Anon., 2008). From 1971, the large rehearsal room doubled as a performance space, as a 110-seat Studio (Rosenthal, 2020).
As the Young Vic outlived its intended lifespan and entered the twenty-first century, the deterioration of the existing building had to be addressed by the Arts Council. It was essential to retain the Young Vic character, through its flexible design, while also improving its public facilities (Anon., 2020). Responding to the original brief of the theatre and the current social context, the new Young Vic had to accommodate various uses throughout the day. In the morning it is a factory, meeting room, an office and a coffee house, in lunchtime, the foyer is a café, the afternoon it is a communal hub for young people, and in the evening, it is a crowded arts space and a bar/restaurant (Anon., 2020). To provide the theatre with these improved facilities, the redevelopment naturally required more funds, and it was completed at the total cost of 7 million.

The redevelopment of the entrance and foyer followed the initial idea of centring the theatre around the surviving butcher shop, which became the box office. Previously, when waiting to enter the auditorium for a show, the public waited in a line on the street (Anon., 2008). The informality of the productions perhaps went alongside the classless and inclusive reputation of the theatre. Nevertheless, the facilities had to be improved to cater to the public. With no protection from the elements and overcrowding, patrons with disabilities would likely be unable to attend any production unless accompanied by nurses or companions. Initially, there was pressure to remove the butcher's shop in the design process, mainly from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).

In addition to the auditorium improvements, two new studio spaces (the Maria and the Clare) were included in the redevelopment. These studios were designed to be completely flexible. Both studios could be configured for performances, rehearsal space or workshops, by adding or removing seating, through the use of the available mezzanine or not, and with the option of allowing natural light or blackout blinds. Partition walls could also be added using inset integrated fixings slotted into the blockwork walls, and the floors were sprung plywood to accommodate dance or more physically imposing uses (Anon., 2008). In order for Haworth Tompkins to design these multipurpose spaces, they undertook months of consultations with user groups to anticipate the future uses of the theatre. As Toby Johnson of Haworth Tomkins commented in an interview:

"…on a lot of our projects, there will be a sort of user group, disability user group who will be consulted and who will input their lived experience sort of based on the design proposals that we're putting forward." (Johnson, 2021)

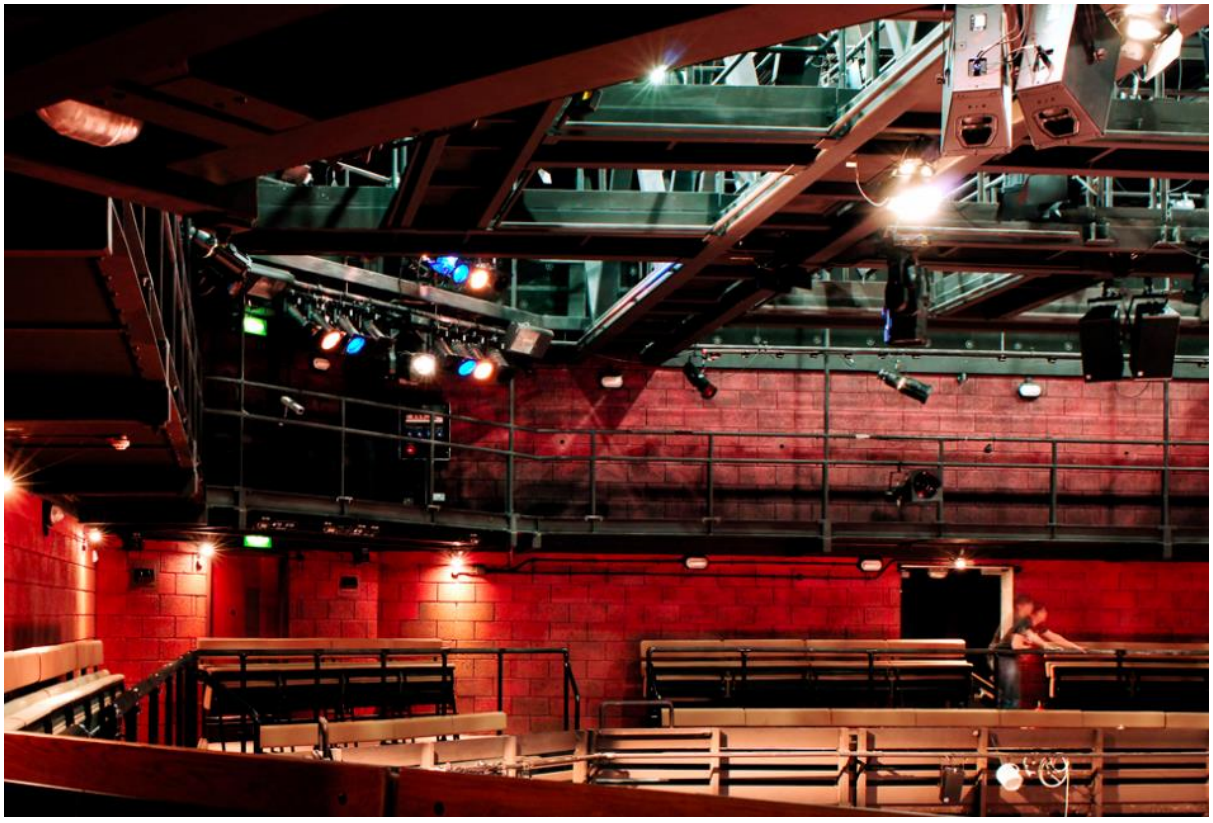

Figure 8: Young Vic auditorium view of technical level (Haworth Tompkins, 2006)

The existing auditorium was heightened to allow for a new lighting grid and provide a moveable wall and demountable gallery into a large new workshop, extending the existing thrust stage to break the boundary of the square room. This addition of a studio connected to the main auditorium offers an

entirely new backstage area where the main stage can be accessed easily. The improved circulation and access to the stage benefit actors with and without disabilities, proving that accessibility considered in the design process benefits all patrons of a building. The seating of the auditorium was also increased, and to provide flexibility for theatre-makers, plywood seating can be demounted to comply with the production's set design. The balcony mezzanine wraps around the upper level of the auditorium like scaffolding but can also be assembled to allow visitors to enter and exit at this level (Anon., 2008). Like the Leeds Playhouse, the creation of new vomitory entrances and exits in the auditorium increases accessibility to the seating by giving patrons with mobility/visual restrictions an option of entering the auditorium at an entrance closest to their booked seats. In the original design, only being able to access the seating from the ground level guarantees overcrowding when attendees enter the auditorium, making it more uncomfortable for patrons with disabilities. Being conscious of all patrons' needs, the Young Vic continues to invite all members of the community.

Using the Young Vic's success as an example, inviting members of the disabled community to discourse regarding the design of a public space proved to contribute to the overall success of the theatre by taking into consideration the needs for accessibility during the design process. Reinforcing that accessibility design is not merely an addition to a new building but can be incorporated in the principal design to create a successful inclusive space. Perhaps without being sure of the outcome (as the qualitative collected from a user group may not outline all the possible obstacles to the disabled community in a design) the Young Vic offers a chance to not only disabled patrons to engage in the theatre community. They are also accommodating actors by designing their environment to be flexible to provide for them on stage.

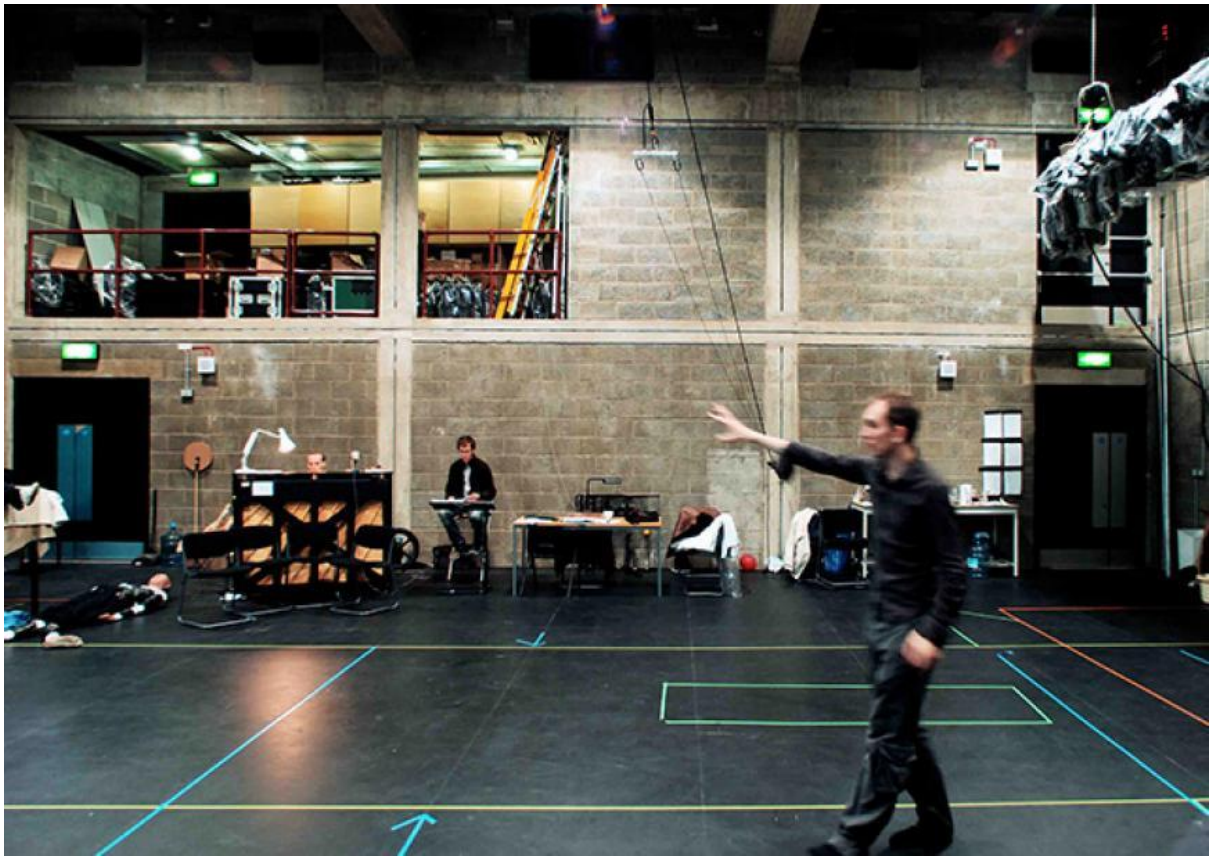

Figure 9: Young Vic studio theatre (Haworth Tompkins, 2006)

Another element of inclusivity that is addressed in the redevelopment of the Young Vic is its public bathrooms. Accessible bathrooms are on the ground, and first floor and their new signage for bathrooms address nonbinary and transgender staff and theatre patrons. These communities are also allowed to perform on stage at the Young Vic, where casting calls have encouraged actors who identify to participate in new theatre work (Anon., 2016). When discussing accessibility with Toby Johnson, he elaborated on how the improved Young Vic circulation was designed to create opportunities to explore the building that everyone could access. (interview) However, Johnson recognises that the technical layer above the main auditorium was not designed to be accessible to staff who cannot physically climb onto the lighting rig, which seems to be a common obstacle that is overlooked in theatre design. Although what may seem contradictory, in the education system when young technicians are being trained, it is recognised that they need access to these technical areas.

"We did do it for a school project in Oxford, the north wall art centre, which was like an educational is a very small educational auditorium. It was felt that because part of that education was learning about theatre technology, the grid should be accessible as well as the other spaces within the theatre."

In conclusion to this case study, the Young Vic is recognisably a strong example of how accessibility can be integrated and add to the experience created when one enters a theatre with heritage. The theatre also contributes to creating an accessible environment behind the theatre scenes; however, with the benefit of patron feedback, it should be acknowledged that there are still elements of inaccessibility that society needs to address.

Case Study 3: London Palladium, Soho.

When analysing the accessibility design in theatres, it is necessary to discuss various venues in order to assert that regardless of budget, the responsibility to design inclusively should be taken by all public venues. For this reason, the final case study of this dissertation is the London Palladium.

The London Palladium is recognised for having an intricate design contributed to by several architects over its lifetime. Before being known as The London Palladium, The Corinthian Bazaar was a music hall opened on Argyll street by Owen Lewis in 1868 (Anon., s.f.). After only three years, it was converted to a circus building using Jethro Thomas Robinson's design. The site then became home to a circus and an ice-skating rink (Anon., s.f.) before becoming the theatre formerly known as The Palladium. The theatre seats over two thousand guests, and is notably the most famous theatre in London, known for its variety shows and pantomimes. Walter Gibbons designed the original theatre building, to compete with London's already famous variety theatres (Anon., 2017) such as the London Colosseum. Theatre architect Frank Matcham was also part of the Palladium design alongside Gibbons. Though the Palladium sought to compete with other top theatres, since the target audiences were the same, Matcham wanted the middle class to come together to enjoy shows less intensively than the previously popular music halls (Bano, 2020). The Palladium aimed to reflect public demand, under Walter Gibbons' management, the public could enjoy variety shows, such as Sir Thomas Beecham's opera company which performed a series of operas and the bioscopes in the Palladium. Other diversions from the chief business of variety have included minstrel shows, farces, National Sunday League concerts, ballets, pantomimes and revues (Anon., 1963).

Although all of the case studies describe theatres with the intention to not only house performances but create community spaces within their walls, what differentiates the London Palladium from its more contemporary counterparts is that the theatre existed during an enormous shift in the perception of disability rights in the UK. For a variety of reasons rooted in religion, Darwinism and

economics, discrimination towards disabled people was tolerated up until the Second World War, and the extermination of disabled people in Nazi concentration camps. Following the war, effort began being made to integrate disabled people into society. This was done by introducing community-based services and personal helpers (Barnes, 1991). Unfortunately, as evident in the survival of the London Palladium and the Young Vic's foyer, the war did not erase the buildings that were designed to deny the existence of the disabled community.

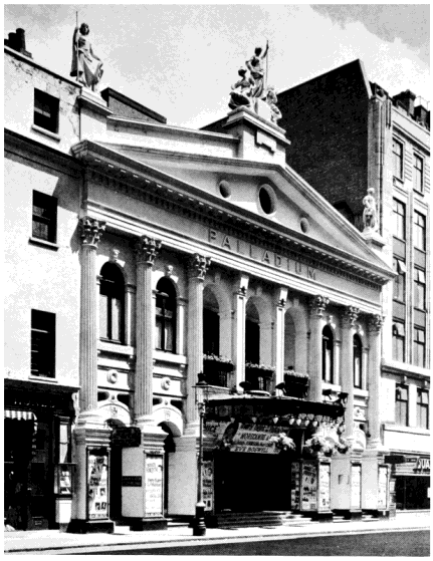

Figure 10: London Palladium in 1962
(London County Council, 1963)

Another common factor in all three case studies explored in this dissertation is the three theatres were designed to be more than just theatre spaces. Walter Gibbons wanted the London Palladium to be "less severe than the orthodox auditorium" (This is Theatre, 2020) by including what is known as a Palm Court. Behind the stalls, it offers spaces for people to sit in public or more private areas, meet casually, or discuss business. The theatre's booking hall has its separate entrance, which was once a passageway through to a merchant building but is now a considerable part of the Palladium complex, where patrons collect their tickets (Anon., 2017). As can be observed from the photograph (Figure 9), the theatre's main entrance is inaccessible to patrons using wheelchairs. As confirmed by Shona Louise (Louise, 2021), the Palladium uses a side entrance to compensate for the entrance.

The revolving stage in the Palladium's auditorium has been present in pop culture for decades, recognised from the television series "Sunday Night at the London Palladium". However, in 2001 it was pronounced outdated and took too much space in the auditorium (Theatre Trust, 2009). The auditorium has been widely renowned as an intimate audience experience, perhaps due to how close the stage is to the two circle levels of seats (Anon., s.f.). However, based on the testimony of Shona Louise, this positive experience is not widely available to all patrons:

"…the only big issue for myself is it's quite a raked floor in the stalls where the wheelchair spaces are and so as a wheelchair user, when you're going around the back to get to your seat, you're so sort of tipped and slanted that it's quite an unnerving experience."

The issue that Shona describes is not uncommon in major theatres. Before the Leeds Playhouse's redevelopment, without any level, mid-level entry into the rows of seating, patrons in wheelchairs would have had no choice other than being seated on the very first row or the furthest row from the stage, both with restricted views of the performance. However, a common appraisal to Matcham's designs is his clear sightlines, which can be observed in the Palladium. The cantilever system used to support the gallery seating means that pillars are not necessary, so certain seats views are no longer restricted (Bano, 2020). Matcham was also well known for designing affordable theatres that were adhering to the increasing safety requirements (Toulmin, 2014). During this time theatres was becoming more popular; safety was an issue. Fires were common due to the use of gas lighting within timber structures, and without enough exits and escape routes many people died as a result. Matcham used concrete and stone while creating complex ventilation systems to reduce the risk of fire while also making theatre patrons more comfortable by reducing overheating in the auditorium (Bano, 2020).

Even though Matcham was one of the first theatre architects to consider audience members comfort and safety in his designs, it should be noted at this time in the mid twentieth century, there was no legislation assuring these rights were applicable to the disabled community, and these rights only gained legal protection in 1995 under the Disability Discrimination Act (gov.uk, 1995).

To provide patrons with the reassurance of their safety in the redevelopment design, Peter from CharcoalBlue described the following alterations made to the Leeds Playhouse Courtyard theatre:

"A shallower rake that is also permanent could also have the handrails relative to whatever changes. I'm very keen that any level chain should have a handrail. I've had elderly parents who have strength on one side but not on the other. So, having handrails on level changes on both sides of an aisle or let or step change, to my mind is important because one step, it still needs something to help study them. And this isn't either regulated or expected in theatres. But I think it's very important for access that it's even little sort of a post with a ball on the top is enough to help someone manage level change. So, all sorts of things like that were also improved by making a shallow rake in the Courtyard."

It can be noted that these alterations suggested by the redevelopment of the Leeds Playhouse do benefit not only individuals with physical disabilities but also benefit the elderly community who may not have always required additional support. For this reason, contemporary designers should consider accessibility from the early stages of development, in order to accommodate the future needs of our generation.

COVID-19 has created countless obstacles for venues in the cultural and hospitality industries in the current social climate. As designers and theatre directors plan how theatres will move forward, the disabled community has a growing concern that their limited existing commodities will be stripped of them. Such as Shona Louise, when discussing theatre post-COVID-19, she fears:

"…the "new normal" might end up shutting disabled people out of theatres even more than in previous times."

She addresses various examples of obstacles she believes to be looming due to the pandemic. Due to the need for increased queuing, theatre attendees who would not have required additional support pre-COVID-19 would now require additional assistance when attending any theatre venue. The effect this has on patrons who always required additional assistance on-site is that unless the staff available increases in parallel, the availability of assistance will not be enough to accommodate. The London Palladium was one of the first theatres to reopen with the new measures dictated by government guidelines, including socially distanced queuing and a one-way system throughout the venue. The venue that initially could house 2286 patrons held 1000 for this pilot event. Audience feedback needed to be collected at this event, as there is no historical precedent for running a theatre venue in present circumstances. Shona highlighted in a blog post that another attendee had attempted to purchase tickets to this event, including the companion ticket she required, but was

only sent one ticket based on the show had sold out. Despite her being a member of the LW Theatre's Access Scheme, her additional needs were already addressed. Another issue is how the one-way system affects audience members with invisible disabilities. An audience member with Crohn's Disease commented:

"I have Crohn's Disease so quick toilet accessibility is a necessity, at the Palladium pilot test it was two people maximum at a time so I can't see me being able to get in the toilet quickly. If I'm at the front of a section and there's a one-way system I have to go a long way to reach a toilet and time-wise that wouldn't work".

The back of house facilities was redesigned by Lee Fitzgerald Architects and were finished in 2017, the main priority being to rationalise the circulation and different levels of the spaces (Lee Fitzgerald Architects, 2017). The Quick-change backstage area pictured below resides underneath the stage (Duell, 2021). Based on the popularity of the Palladium, combined with such a recent redevelopment that is equipped with more contemporary methods then when the Palladium was first built, it would have hopefully meant that the design of these new areas could encompass inclusivity in a way not done before. Dressing room spaces were enlarged and incorporate en-suite shower rooms and bespoke furniture and lighting systems allow flexible re-configuration to suit different shows. (Lee Fitzgerald Architects, 2017) These developments are essential to provide the opportunity to disabled creatives to access the theatre, as is the case that not all commercial venues are prepared to make the appropriate changes. The Stage reported that careers for disabled actors are damaged due to the lack of accessibility in the back of house areas. These obstacles range from no accessible toilet backstage to actors using wheelchairs being forced to crawl onto the stage (Comerford, 2020). In relation to the previous quotation from Shona Louise's blog, the absence of appropriate toilets is especially concerning, as for an actor living with Crohn's Disease, it would be impossible for them to be catered for within their workplace, as they spend countless hours in the dressing rooms (Baluch, 2009). To protect actors, the updated Equality Act states that both large and small entertainment venues are required to make "reasonable adjustments" to remove barriers for disabled people. This includes changing a physical feature of the building (Comerford, 2020). In the case of the London Palladium, redeveloping their backstage areas shows that the theatre is conscious of the changing social and legal requirements, both previously to COVID-19 and currently, however, based on the photograph included (Figure 11) it can be noted that level change is still an obstacle to inclusivity that the Palladium is not prepared to fix.


Figure 11: London Palladium: The quick-change area under the stage (Dazeley, 2021)

To conclude the final case study of this dissertation, despite the London Palladium's fame and relevance in the present theatre industry, it does not house the growing initiatives in disability inclusion that the other case studies do. Research and critique of the design of the theatre is also scarce, perhaps due to a form of income to the theatre being tours of the back of house. However, this is still problematic for actors with disabilities as a main source of information on the lack of accessibility seems to be in published articles.

Conclusion:

To conclude this dissertation, through analysing the historical and social context of theatre design in parallel to the rise of the disability movement, commercial theatres should be evaluated by how they address the needs of their audience and community. By looking at the redevelopments within the case studies, it can be seen that architects and directors that invite discourse with members of the disabled community are growing closer to creating universally inclusive spaces where theatre can be celebrated. Despite the lack of representation and legislation in the times where the theatres were built, the architects understood that if theatres were to benefit the community, additional uses

had to be incorporated into the design, which could be accessed by anyone regardless of age or social standing.

When exploring the opportunities for actors with disabilities in these theatre spaces, it is apparent that unfortunately there is limited research and examples of facilities that have been made available. There seemingly is a correlation between venues that prioritize easy circulation of theatre props with venues with less obstacles to a disabled actor. That being the case, then society still chooses to only recognise the basic functional requirements of a theatre instead of prioritizing the experience of another human being. The subconscious ableism instilled in able bodied society can only be combated by giving the disabled community an opportunity to share their perspective, through discourse or the arts. In contemporary society, there is a growing interest in non-traditional embodiments (Willcocks, 2014), this is proven by the huge public acclaim of plays such as “The Elephant Man” (BBC, 2018) and the popular musical “Newsies” (Broadway World, 2018) where only the latter has ever had a disabled actor perform in one of its key roles.

It is the responsibility of young architects and designers to design consciously to include entire communities. Using the Leeds Playhouse as an example, Peter discusses the needs of not only wheelchair users or people with visual impairments but describes how small details such as a handrail can completely transform the experience of the theatre for an elderly patron, by removing the looming anxiety implied by inaccessible building that they are not welcome. It can be assumed that all up and coming designers have a relation or have met an elderly person, even better if they have shared experiences with a person with a disability, and discussing or simply observing how they manoeuvre the world cannot be underestimated as it is an important development in a designer’s ability to design with empathy.

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Appendix A: Interview with Regan Linton, Theatre Director Phamily Theatre Company:

Rachel: I suppose to start. Are theatres, or the majority of theatres, designed with disability inclusion these in mind?

Regan: No

Rachel: Full stop completely?

Regan: It largely intersects with just the nature of disability over the course of history in general. Obviously, you had points in time where not many people with disabilities necessarily survived. Where they weren't included comprehensively in our societies and in our arts and everything. So obviously, the environments were not built with them in mind. And I think now, as we have and as science has developed, as technology has developed, as human rights have developed, and we've started to incorporate people of all different kinds into these art spaces or into any spaces, obviously that that means that we're bringing in humans with different needs. So, no, I think the majority, at least I as a wheelchair user, my experience over time has been coming into many, many spaces that are not accessible, even ones that are built more recently. Obviously, over here in the United States, we have the Americans with Disabilities Act that says after a certain point in time, if you're building new construction and if it's a certain size and going to have a certain capacity, that it needs to be accessible. But I think you homed in on something that's really important, which often, again, because of stigma, we're not thinking of like people with disabilities in the arts space or in the technical space or in the design space. We're thinking of them as, oh, they're our grandparents coming in their wheelchairs to see the show as opposed to thinking, no, we might have a blind doctor, we might have a deaf technician, we might have a lighting designer who uses a wheelchair. So I guess, yeah, simply put, no, they aren't designed to be inclusive.

I think one of the one of the challenges, at least I know, like here in the United States, it's different when I travel, for instance, when I go to Japan, everything is much more functional reform over there. But they also find a way to weave in form and design it and so that it doesn't feel like you're sacrificing aesthetic when you're also designing. But it is a very different aesthetic. And I think here in America, it's often like, oh, we're going to redo something or modify something. You know, everybody gets really concerned over the aesthetic of it. And that sometimes gets in the way of the opportunities for just making something functional. But I really believe that particularly with

creativity, if we didn't see it as a hindrance to us, if we didn't see accessibility as a hindrance, then we'd be more engaged in saying, OK, how do we do combine these? How do we design these, like, universally inclusive and accessible spaces and also make them super badass and cool and attractive and as aesthetically pleasing and all of that? So, I think there's definitely a way to do that. But I don't usually find that in art spaces.

Rachel: With your experience as an actor and also as the artistic director of Phamily, what obstacles have you found in backstage areas and do you have any possible solutions to them?

Regan: Its funny often access and accessible environments comes down to like, oh, we need accessible bathrooms. Right. Because that's often how people encounter, especially non-disabled people the accessible stall in the bathroom. And maybe that's all they really notice in terms of accessibility. I mean, so that's one thing, is it often just bathrooms are not accessible, particularly to wheelchairs or the traveling points backstage. You know, obviously theatre spaces. Many people used to do theatre or other art forms in basements or in nooks and crannies and kind of trying to find whatever spaces they could to make art, which means that often you're kind of having to overhaul a space, but therefore, it's kind of use what you have. And that means sometimes you're sacrificing space backstage because you want more space on stage for you. So, we have these incredibly tight little environments or people if you're trying to get to a catwalk, you're navigating a rickety old ladder, you know, to get up to and doing acrobatics as you move through the lighting space. So, I do think, you know, bathrooms, just general accessibility and space. You know, also thinking of navigating, like if you have an actor who uses a wheelchair and then another actor who's blind and you don't want them to collide, then you've got to have enough space for them to navigate around each other and not be at risk of running into each other. So, I think just the general space, then again, just things like doors and more choices, things like where the where mirrors are placed, obviously. Luckily, dressing rooms have often been designed around the idea that somebody's sitting like if they're, you know, putting on makeup or putting on a wig, so often the mirrors will be low enough, but they're still really cramped. So I think overall, building things for a standing body as opposed to a wheeling body or just a different kind of body. Body with a cane, a body with a walker. You know, another thing in terms of communication, one thing a few years ago when we were working with a factor is that we just realized there wasn't a good visual comm system backstage, there wasn't there weren't TV screens built in throughout all the dressing rooms so that he could watch and see what's going on, on stage. So, we had to constantly have somebody going and getting them and cueing him. So, you know, just thinking about all those different functions, I think those

are a few that I found definitely have found. Theatres that are where the dressing rooms are below or above the stage area, again, probably for conservation of space. But then what that means is that often they don't have elevators or reliable elevators to go between. I have a friend who is a sound designer, and he uses a wheelchair and he would have to often pull himself up this incredibly steep stair stairway to get up to the booth where he could do his work. So, yeah, I mean, I think just the overall traditional theatre space, and a lot of theatre spaces that are non-traditional or that are more adaptable, malleable spaces where it's like you kind of just have a big room. It's all on one level, everything backstage is on one level and you can modify it. But I think our idea of a theatre, you know, where you have this kind of proscenium and then maybe you don't have as much space or you have fly space and then you're kind of trying to cram into a building all the other spaces that you need, like dressing rooms and green rooms and audience spaces. Often that just means over time we've sacrificed the space that is needed for unique humans and unique bodies to move through the space safely.

Rachel: I was looking at Phamily's past shows, for example, Romeo and Juliet in Chicago. I was really interested to see how these perform, how did you adapt to these performances?

Regan: Romeo and Juliet was a workshop production. So it wasn't a full production. It was kind of an opportunity. It was the first time. Well, to be second time. Our first time was midsummer. And then the second time our company had kind of delved into Shakespeare and more from a kind of textual point of view. So, the staging was very minimal. We did it in a small little black box theatre. Staging wise, we kept it very simple. I think it's one thing that I love about Shakespeare and his work is that, you know, it's been done time after time. There's a lot of opportunity for re envisioning and what we've found, whether it's Shakespeare or whether it's Kander and Ebb or whatever, is it often if you're just taking a different body that people aren't expecting because it's a non-traditional body or human and putting it into a role, all of a sudden it opens up all of these different narratives and possibilities that you didn't think were there previously. So, for instance, with Romeo and Juliet, both Romeo and Juliet, both had some version of somewhere on the spectrum of autism. And so, thinking about their relationship and thinking about how they would interact physically with each other because of their own discomforts, and yet they were in love. And, you know, it just painted a completely different understanding of our of those two characters, as we usually see. You know, normally they're all over each other, these young lovers. But these two were kind of helpless. So I think just in terms of the thematic elements of the show, it changed a lot. And then I think one of the unique things that we did with that show, we had people that had all different physical

disabilities as well, and they would mostly, you know, kind of move through the space and speak and some of them used a music stand for their script. Some were off book. But it was just very malleable. And I think that's also one of the one of the aspects of what we do in Phamily, that it's very adaptable and we're ready for something to not go as planned. And we delight in that. There's something spontaneous and exciting about, like not having the fully, perfectly staged Broadway show that always goes off the same way without a hitch. There are benefits to both. But I think, you know, just that workshop kind of space was really fun for our actors and felt more accessible, especially because it was the first time they were taking on Shakespeare to feel like, oh, if I mess this up, it's OK, you know? And that's part of the fun of theatre, observing human behaviour and how a human is going to unfold, doing whatever they're going to do and not feeling like you're constrained by the environment in order to do that. Another one other thing we did do with Romeo and Juliet was we had captions that were visible to the audience the entire time. That was really just to make it accessible because we try to include captioning as much as possible. But so many people who weren't as familiar with Shakespeare loved having the words and said it helped so much with their understanding of what was going on and what was being said, because obviously there are folks who just don't feel like they have as much access to kind of old English language. So they really appreciate it. It was one of those elements that we instituted for accessibility for somebody who was deaf or hard of hearing or needed captioning, but it ended up actually enhancing the experience for the entirety of the audience as a kind of universal tool. So anyway, I think those were a couple of reflections on that particular piece

Rachel: Do you host relaxed performances?

Regan: We have started to institute sensory friendly or relaxed performances. We've wrestled with them too, do we make all of them that way? Because family years ago when we started, thirty-one years ago, it was kind of a different philosophy. It was like, we're going to do the same shows that everybody else does and the same way, you know, all the same design elements and grandeur. And we're just going to do it with disabled actors. And then I think over time, it’s become more than just about getting the actors on stage. It's also what is the entirety of the environment that we're creating. So, we've struggled with do we do we change everything into relaxed performances, or do we keep it half and half? It's kind of like, American sign language interpretation where, historically that's been we have our few performances or it's on demand. We offer it. But the next step of that would be, well, we always have shadow interpretation or we're building deaf actors and ASL into all the performances that we're doing. So tthat's one of the biggest challenges of family, is that because

we are we identify as a company that engages people with all different disabilities, sometimes there are things that kind of go in direct conflict with each other in terms of what one person needs and what someone else needs. We try to just balance it as well as we can. So thus far, with the relaxed performances, we usually will just do one or two relax performances over the course of three or four weekends. However, we've started trying to make sure that we use our communication to let people know whether in terms of sensory guides and making sure they know what are the triggering elements of the show so that they can determine whether they can come to a more traditional performance or whether they come to the sensory friendly or relaxed performance. And we found that a lot of people even say they're on the autism spectrum, they will still come to kind of regular, quote unquote, performance. But because they've been cued in as to like, oh, this might be a part where I might want to put my headphones on, they are more aware of what's going to happen. Transparency really becomes the most accessible element in all of it, not keeping those secrets, so people can choose for themselves what works best for them. We also do tactile tours, which is giving an opportunity for people to come in before a show to explore costumes and walk the set. So that is particularly for blind or low vision patrons, they can get a sense of kind of what they're going to be hearing about, alongside the audio description.

Rachel: What do you think has been a good example of a performance with Phamily that should set the standard for inclusion?

Regan: I was just writing something to one of our company members yesterday that was, I don't believe there's a perfect standard. I just think humanity is too complex. We never have something that's going to work for everybody. But that said, I think Phamily on the majority that shows, I think does a pretty good job of getting close to it and still not compromising the experience in different ways. I don't even like to say that, because I think that's often what is used by a number of people in the theatre community to push back against access because they say “oh, but then I'm going to have to compromise principle.” No, it's just about adapting. For instance, in Phamily, we're not compromising design. We're just designing the stage and the set with keeping in mind that we might need railings here for our blind actors to navigate on their own. Or it might be ramps here so that our wheeling actors can move through the space just as efficiently. So, it's not compromising, it's just incorporating those access elements. And I think we try to do that with pretty much everything we do in terms of other examples that I have experienced. What I love about what you're studying is that I think access really comes in from the point of design. It comes in from the point of concept. You can't wait until you've designed the entire thing and then go back and be like, oh, and let's just

throw in a ramp here and throw in, which, ironically, I think is kind of where Phamily initially came from. They were largely working within the structure of what had already been created and trying to adapt to it. But I think the most effective way to do access now is to start from square one, as you're even discussing a show and thinking about a show. Thinking about, OK, where and how will access build into this? How will we design it? What are the available different types of humans? We have to fill up this particular piece. How is that going to impact the narrative, all of that. So yeah, I think it just starts from a much earlier point than most people or most theatre companies usually tend to employ it.

Rachel: What's the process when designing the set for a production?

Regan: We hold open auditions for all of our shows, so we don't precast. That said, we often we have actors who come back time and time again to audition and are often cast in shows. So, we have a pretty good sense of what the possibilities are going to be for what types of disabilities might show up in our actors. We are usually always thinking about certain elements, we're always thinking about wheelchair access, we're always thinking about access for blind or low vision actors, we're always thinking about actors with intellectual or developmental disabilities, sensory processing, all of those different things. So usually, we build in those basic elements from the get-go as we're talking through design. And then our designers often work from a very traditional space of what obviously what our what the concept is, what the themes are, what the general aesthetic is and then is. Often it takes it takes time. And I think that's also where the wider theatre world often doesn't incorporate access because it does take time and attention and it takes an eye and consideration where, for instance, when we were doing Chicago, I directed and I met with our scenic designer, you know, months before it started kind of mapping out, saying, I think this is what I want. And then I would kind of come back with more of an accessibility lens and say, well, I don't think that's necessarily going to work. [00:22:39] We need more points of entry to the stage four wheeling actors. You know, that's a good balance. Is that going to leave us enough space to move through the audience and make sure that we're not walking over people? And so he went through a number of revisions after his initial design to make sure that we were building access and as effectively as possible. So, yeah, I mean, I think and it's one thing families also thought about doing is kind of codifying that into some sort of like this is the process. But I think I've I've often felt and maybe it's I don't know, maybe it's just my lack of time or my laziness of not doing that. But or that's what students like you are going to do for me. But I think a lot of it is also just so relational and knowing a particular person. I mean, so much of access is about as much as we want to build the world is like everything fits for

everybody. You know, there are certain basic principles I think you can achieve for everybody. [00:23:41] And then it's really about OK. [00:23:43] And then on top of that, once we know who this actor is, what are the things that they're going to need and trying to build around that as much as possible. [00:23:51] So so I don't we don't have like we do have an accessible or like a list of accommodations that I can send you if you're interested. [00:24:00] Just in terms of with our actors, what we the typical accommodations we're often building into every process, but then it often becomes a much more nuanced and individual process as we figure out who's in our shows. [00:24:14] Yes, if you could tell me that, that would be wonderful. Thank you. And I suppose that leads on actually to the next thing it was. What would you say? [00:24:23] And you saw people with disabilities should be involved from the very beginning in the process when it comes to the set design and it comes to the writing and and is posed as follows. You've already answered if you have anything else to add. [00:24:40] Like, you know why? Like what? Why do you if you have this, if you were explaining somebody why this has to be it, what would you say? [00:24:52] I think I would say that, you know, again, like I was saying earlier, the majority of our environments have been built with kind of a mono cultural norm as the basis. And therefore, you know, but our world doesn't always look like that monocultural. I remember reading about years ago, the American military was trying to develop like standard sizes for military clothes and such. And so anyway, they went through this whole process where they were essentially evaluating different individuals and seeing how they fit standards in order to kind of figure out what would be like small, medium, large. [00:25:33] And and they basically they came to the conclusion that, like, no one fit the the standard, like nobody ever was an average. [00:25:45] And I think that's just important to remember in our humanity that nobody fits the average. And so and obviously, we like I said, we kind of have to have some sort of baseline so we can all move through the world. But I think we've grown a little bit too accustomed to just designing based on those assumptions of like, oh, well, somebody is going to be walking, somebody is going to be hearing, somebody is going to be seeing, somebody is going to be interacting socially the way that we do and and not considering the flexibility that we need in order to accommodate those differences and those not average people that are often going to be coming into our spaces. And again, that's also why we I think the reason we haven't seen inclusion as much of, say, actors with disabilities is because often the spaces don't allow for them to be there. So even though, like in the United States, one in five people identifies as having some sort of disability, that's not what we see on our bodies. That's not the narrative that we're seeing. And so really, I think if we want to be representing the world more accurately in all of its different diversities, then we've got to be building spaces that allow for that. And I think from my own experience, having been on two feet and then adapted to being on wheels, I know where my own spaces of ignorance were. When I was

on two feet, I wasn't paying attention all the time to what was working for somebody on wheels. So that's why I think it's important to have the people with disabilities and their perspectives really in involved, their voices involved so that they're able to articulate here's how this works. Here's what I need. Here's what people like me need, as opposed to those of us who don't know that experience, making assumptions about it.

Appendix B: Survey with Pippa Stacey, Disability Advocate & Blogger:

**Do you enjoy attending the theatre in your free time?**

Yes

**Are you currently pursuing a career in the theatre industry?**

No

**In your opinion/experience, how accessible is an acting career for a person with a disability?**

Not very!

**In response to your answer for 3), why is that the case?**

Lack of diversity and inclusion support in stage schools and agencies, lack of disabled character roles in the industry.

**In your opinion, does the design of theatre venues play a part in the amount of actors with disabilities in the industry?**

Yes.

**What is the reason for your answer to 5)?**

More accessible venues mean physical accessibility and a greater awareness of these issues; more appealing to individuals!

**Have you ever felt that the design of a theatre venue has limited/alienated your experience?**

Lack of wheelchair accessibility in listed theatre buildings has made me feel unwelcome.

**What specific memory/experience comes to mind when you answer 7)?**

Having to enter West End theatres from separate entrances and have less access to auditorium, merch and other amenities can make you feel as though you're having a lesser experience. However, Front Of House staff can make all the difference!

**Have you ever felt that the set design of a production at a theatre venue has limited/alienated your experience?**

Fast-moving/ rotating sets can be cognitively overwhelming for those with sensory processing conditions.

**What specific memory/experience comes to mind when you answer 9)?**

'Peter Pan Goes Wrong's revolving stage got rather chaotic!

**Can you please describe a positive experience at a *named theatre venue, in regards to accessibility?**

New London Theatre, please see: https://www.broadwayworld.com/westend/article/Front-Of-House-Staff-Can-Have-A-Big-Impact-On-Theatre-Access-20170518

**Can you please describe a negative experience at a *named theatre venue, in regards to accessibility?**

Newly refurbished Victoria Palace Theatre, please see: https://www.lifeofpippa.co.uk/2018/05/06/hamilton-west-end-at-victoria-palace-theatre/

**In your opinion, what are 2 important issues that theatre designers need to consider when designing with disability inclusion in mind (if you have more then 2 feel free to list them!)**

Universal wheelchair accessibility and level access where appropriate, more seating for patrons with invisible conditions.

**What has been your experience in terms of accessibility when it comes to theatres, in comparison to other venues (concert, museum, cinema etc)?**

Theatres tend to be inherently less accessible, but staff and the industry seem to be more aware of inclusion and catering for additional needs.

**What specific memory/experience comes to mind when you answer 14)?**

I've been to plenty of venues with better wheelchair access, but faced challenging attitudes from staff. Theatres, however, are generally less wheelchair-friendly but with more welcoming staff!

**What is a good example of disability representation within film, theatre or TV?**

I genuinely can't think of one, all are problematic in their own way!

**(OPTIONAL) Any themes, issues or resources you think may benefit my research.**

https://www.lifeofpippa.co.uk/2019/07/29/how-to-book-access-theatre-tickets-seats-for-disabled-patrons/

https://accessforus.com/theatre-and-disabled-access-with-pippa/

In terms of other people, lovely Shona would be a good contact! http://www.shonalouise.com/

Appendix C: Interview with Peter Ruthven Hall, Senior Consultant at CharcoalBlue:

Rachel: In general, how do you analyse where accessibility is needed in any sort of project they are getting?

Peter: Well, it's a starting point. I mean, it's incredibly difficult to design an auditorium without thinking about, certain wheelchair positions. But of course, there are many more aspects than just fitting in wheelchairs. But I think that's the biggest spatial problem. And a lot of accessibility issues about immunity seats, about transfer seats, about seats within a few steps of a level entrance about hearing seats, where people don't need to see but want to hear well, about where you place guide dogs, where you place wheelchairs, when they've been removed as a whole sort of batch of things. Also, just about size of people, you know, we always-- all seats are normally the same size, they're not in fact, but when you walk in you look at an auditorium assume everything's the same size, but there are so much higher, so much lower, so much wider, we have to think about super wide seats for the obese, you have to think about recumbent patients on a stretcher, that they need to come in on a trolley, all sorts of things like that. There are big problems about motorized wheelchairs and the height of the head relative to a normal person, I'm sorry, not a normal person, I'll rephrase that, relative to someone who's sitting in a normal seat. And about making sure that-- I mean, I'm very keen that anyone in a wheelchair or anyone who does have a disability does not come into the theatre. I mean [inaudible 03:30] I'm thinking of the auditorium but of course, it's the whole building. But my concern is largely the auditorium is that they don't have any physical mental barriers against enjoying their performance, they should come in, everything should be provided for them very easy, easy access, they shouldn't feel that they're blocking someone's view, they shouldn't feel that they're over conspicuous, often wheelchair positions, they're in a very conspicuous place in an auditorium. By default, they're larger, they need special requirements. But integration is absolutely vital. So, making sure that there's a choice of places and that people feel that they are welcome, accommodated is sort of fundamental starting point before one thinks about sightlines, about how many tears the auditorium is, what the ambience of the auditorium is. One has to start with what level are you bringing people into the auditorium and what's intuitive? And simple, straightforward. So that's just sort of beginning of where we begin. I don't think you can, it's not something you can add. And in fact, retrofits and refurbishment is very difficult because of course they haven't been considered the accessibility issues, haven't been considered to the same degree as they are now. So, we need to think much more carefully from first principles.

Rachel: How do you consider accessibility in theatres compared to other venues? And what do you think what features are different or what do you think differentiates them?

Peter: Well, I suppose the whole point about a theatre is a closely seated community. So, you actually want to be brushing shoulders with your neighbours. And that's not always the case. But in the cinema, you tend to have enough space between you and the neighbour. You can wriggle and stretch and shake and do all sorts of things without affecting anybody. And cinema is very passive experience as a result theatre is about jostling shoulders and laughing and going; why are you reacting like that? Why are you laughing? You know that's that gives back to the performers and helps other people experience what your experience So it's important that theatres are tighter spaces. And if you simply create swathes of accessible walkways between the seats, all you do is spoil the atmosphere, you push people further away, they see less, they see less clarity, they don't see the eyes, they don't see the face, they don't see hand gestures. You rely on much bigger gestures, you rely on amplification or shouting, could be voice projection, but very few people have it in the way that's way before TV and film, to be able to project their voices into the volumes of the auditorium. So, I think one's got to be very careful about making sure the intimacy, the closeness is important to the vitality of the theatre. And you can get it on the football stands, you can get it in music venues where you're standing next to someone and you're sort of getting hot and sweaty together. Theatre is slightly more sort of [inaudible 06:08] but a bit more polite than that. But I think you want to be able to feel that there's a connection between me and my neighbour when I sit down, so it's important not-- you've got to retain that despite whatever else you might be doing.

Rachel: In your experience with charcoal blue, are there any examples of spaces or theatres that have worked in terms of the experience of the actor with physical or sensory impairment?

Peter: Not directly but there are several that my colleagues have worked on, Light Gray Eye in North London. And I mean, of course that universe specifically for performance with different abilities and the aspire trust can do co company. There are venues that are specifically for ‘I'm chicken sheds another one’ that are full or people with abilities, different at different levels of ability. And there are more and more theatres now that are saying it's important. I'm surprised though, the number of architects I work with, who don't grasp that immediately, it's a really-- and I'm thinking I'm in a different sort of workplace than others? It's so fundamental to build environment, to think about everybody's needs, that if you don't start with it, you can't possibly improve on what's gone before. So, there are moments when I'm a bit shocked and I'm thinking you need to do a lot of research before

you're going to be ready for this. And that's a matter of years rather than seconds. You want people to be absolutely there with you. But that's my specialism. I'm there to guide and help people.

Rachel: Which feature of the theatre do you think is the most important to pay attention to in regard to accessibility?

Peter: Well, I suppose universal access is the-- I don't think there's a single feature because it's about how you interpret it. But level thresholds I suppose is possibly the most significant. So, avoiding trips, avoiding unnecessary steps and ramps, level changes are always a problem. Of course, it is. Have to have level changes. In the old days you would have a rake of one in nine sometimes the steepest ranks of auditoria one in nine, you're not even allowed one in five is the 1.5 point four something is the steepest [inaudible 09:59], a raked seating area now. And so, if you can't do with a rake, you have to do it with steps. And so, we've made it across, we've made it much harder for ourselves by saying that we can only navigate a certain angle of ramp which can be uncomfortable for some people, but you'd find it out in the street. And it's important that the stalls are elevated enough for people to get a view but at 5.4 degrees it's too shallow. So, you're going to have to have steps. So, steps are inherent, what you have to do is make sure that there are levels, the landings, how you get on into the auditorium, how you get onto the stage, how you get from the stage, the auditorium to the stage and then how you get from the outside onto the different levels of the auditorium. They have to be as simple as possible. And that is the whole three projects on at the moment where we're looking at sites. And that level entry, I suppose is my fundamental starting point about can you get people in and out to the stage? Can you get things goods in now to the stage with the levels that are on the site? And the best site will be the one where they onto barrier.

Rachel: Do you have any more examples of theatres you have worked on with clear limitations?

Peter: Yes. Well, of course there is a sort of presumption that if you're a technician in the theatre you will be fully able bodied, which is not always the case. So, things like control rooms are always up a flight of steps because they're over the heads of the back row. The technical levels, you have to climb into, you know, there may be a door that provides you with level access. But you also if you're going to focus a light on the lighting and bridge above the auditorium or indeed on the stage, you need a new port and access platform, or you've got to beyond the natural extension of your wheelchair or whatever other device you might need to add access. So, you know, would you put for instance load counterweights into counterweight cradles on the side of the stage to balance the weight of scenery,

which is a bit like a shop assistance task. It's a twisting, you pick up a weight, you transfer it over and you drop it into a cradle that then moves up and down opposite the weight of this flow scenery. I mean, that's a really difficult job to do even if you're quite a strong person. And there's lots of repetitive strain injuries from doing that with lead weights that you need to hold close, but you've actually got to hold forward from you. So, there are all sorts of things that you sort of think well, do we need to make that accessible? Do we need to allow someone to be able to service the pulleys above the stage and the technical grid? Do we need people to get into the different plant rooms and stuff? And I suppose the answer is yes, we do. They may not be possible to provide statutory parameters for that. But if we can provide access we should do. So, I suppose anything in the theatre was trying not to be preventative. Oh, I if theatres develop over time, people want bigger capacities, they want to change the relationship between the stage and the audience, maybe move the stage forward, take the stage away, put a big hole in the floor, suspend a helicopter above the stage as they did in in Miss Saigon. We need to make theatre vital. We need to enable things. So, if I was pouring concrete, I would be preventing something for being flexible in the long term. I suppose it's just about every-- the attitude is about enabling a creative possibility, ease of access, enjoyment, all that sort of stuff should be enabled rather than someone saying, I don't want you to do it that way, which is what some architects do, ultimately imposed. And I think it's great shame.

Rachel: Talking more about the Leeds Playhouse. When consulting for the auditorium, because you specialized in the auditorium as well, and the courtyard theatre, what considerations did you take in terms of accessibility for actors and audience members with disabilities?

Peter: Okay, in some way the Quarry is the more interesting conundrum. But you asked about the Courtyard, so that's fine. The first thing is the stage is levelled with the entire backstage area and the lowest level of the building, which is level thirty. There are three-meter floor height, so the first level is level 33 and the next 36, and then 39, 42 and so on. Which is probably a very sort of 90s solution to floor-to-floor levels. But today they're a bit too tight, so it's quite a tricky retrofit of various things. But the stage is that level 30, which is the same stage level for the quarry, the ground floor dressing rooms, the front of house entry, the back of house entry, so it's all very easy. The courtyard and the levels don't tie up with the principal floor levels because basically if the first gallery was three meters above the stage, it would be too high for any sense of connection between that gallery and the stage and of course the one above which would be three meters higher, six meters would be like a big theatre of twice the capacity for the distances and that would be no good. So, when it was designed by Putin, the levels of the first and second balcony were brought down and there are ramps that managed that

level change. So that's a good thing. The big problem with the conception for the West Yorkshire Playhouse as it was, was that you would travel up to level 36 two floors up in order to come down into the auditorium. And partly because the Quarry theatre really needed a mid-level entry. The courtyard had it already, but the queries need was greater. That middle level auditorium sorry [inaudible 18:40] was driven through plant rooms and various other accommodation in order to create a first-floor landing as it were within the auditorium. So, our principal route into the courtyard theatre was the same as before but it was just made easier. However, the design of the courtyard was with a retractable seating unit so that you could have a flat floor option. And the drive for increased capacity meant that-- and I suppose also because this has also happened in the Dorfman theatre at the National Theatre, which I also worked on. And the chief executive was involved with too, so we had a common reference for that. That the increased capacity was an important thing for the financial security of the building. It was going to improve artistic possibilities, so would get better touring productions there because the potential income from ticket sales would be greater. And it would also help them with income for their own shows, although to a certain extent they've got a third venue now. So, in fact, they can program work in this rock void rather than use one of the bigger theatres with a smaller capacity. So, increasing the capacity by 80 seats was fundamental to that but it meant going for shallow stalls. So, the link between the first floor on the ground floor was effectively our staircase [inaudible 20:26] by the seating unit. Now from a wheelchair point of view that makes no difference at all. But the fact is that the new lift would access stalls, circle and--- actually it doesn't in fact access the balcony in the courtyard, the upper balcony. So, we would need to fit all the wheelchair positions on the ground floor, the stalls and the first gallery as before. Now we had an option for them not all to be on the side as they were the original concept, they were fully twisted on the side galleries and sort of you would sit sort of sideways on looking at the stage. And I suppose meant you've sort of distorted a bit, but those seats are still there. But there are many more that are head on in the shallow stalls. And in fact, because the lift now goes to the stalls and because we could rewrite the stalls and put in landings, so the seats could be removed. In fact, even also little step could be removed in order to get wheelchairs in, you can get the minimum 16 much more comfortably. But if you want to go higher, I think we did something like 20 wheelchair positions by removing lots of seats, you could get a whole group of people with wheelchairs in there, it will take a little while the lift is only a two-wheelchair lift. So, it will take a bit of time to get people there. But in terms of escape, they will go straight out into a ground level across the stage or to the side of the auditorium. So, it's not an unsafe situation. There's something I want to say about bad tearing. Yes, of course. A shallower rake that is also permanent could also have the handrails relative to whatever changes. I'm very keen that any level chain should have a handrail. I've had elderly parents who have strength on one side but not on

the other. So, having handrails on level changes on both sides of an aisle or let or step change, to my mind is important because one step, it still needs something to help study them. And this isn't either regulated or expected in theatres. But I think it's very important for access that it's even little sort of a post with a ball on the top is enough to help someone manage level change. So, all sorts of things like that were also improved by making a shallow rake in the courtyard.

Rachel: In your opinion do you think contemporary architecture prioritizes accessibility to an appropriate standard?

Peter: Oh, I don't know. That's very general. As I said before, I think some architects are not as aware as they perhaps ought to be. And that might simply be their life experience hasn't put them in charge of someone in a wheelchair, someone who's a bit infirm, someone who needs immediate access to a toilet because that's the other thing in a theatre that we sometimes put disabled or accessible toilets, a long way away from the seats where the wheelchair user or someone might be sitting. And, you know, when you realize you need to pee, you want to get to the accessible as fast as possible. So, I think all those things are about life experience. And if designers haven't worked with people with issues about that, then I think it's much harder to jog your mind every so often, that's important. So, I think there's always room for improvement. And I think there are some people who are exemplary and others who are less good. And I can't comment on the state of the industry, I'm afraid I don't know well enough to give an impression. But I think I've given examples of people who do understand and who don’t and hopes to moderate those who need help.

Rachel: Do you involve testing in the design process?

Peter: Yes, I do. The best, of course, access consultants and now on projects much more frequently, although budgets do sometimes prevent their input to a sort of single review session rather than a positive contribution. But I suppose my most illuminating sessions were when I was with an access consultant who was in a wheelchair, he brought his friend who had a different disability within the wheelchair from him. And we marked out in the crucible Theatre in Sheffield, different wheelchair arrangements. And again, the crucible wasn't existing theatre, it's all concrete raked. So, we couldn't cut into things easily, we had to build out in front of things. And they were very difficult narrow changes, which were all nonstandard conditions, there was no sort of prescription for how he would solve them. So, we needed to solve them from first principles, and we marked out areas and between the three of us, we tested each circumstance with sort of panels and seats and rails and whether we

could see over the rail, whether you could actually turn your wheelchair if you needed to or whether we needed to provide guidance to say that if your wheelchair was under these dimensions, then this would be acceptable for you. But if it wasn't, if you had a bigger wheelchair, you would be limited to these locations within the auditorium. And that was fascinating, and it was a very positive collaboration. There are always user groups. And again, I'm surprised when I say, who's your user group? Who leads your user group? And they go, what do you mean? I say well, okay, so someone's gone out to the people who have accessibility needs and said, what do you need to come to our theatre? How do we make it more approachable to you? And they go, we don't do that. Okay, well, you know, maybe this is the moment when you start thinking about that, you're spending some public money on your building to improve it and it's all about accessibility. Maybe you need to start up a user group that's going to-- you can advise, and they can advise you. The feedback we sometimes get is quite vitriolic. And in fact, the Leeds I can't remember what they were called but it was a group that works with Leeds council on buildings. They were very upset by the poor standard of accessibility put into the Leeds arena. Now, I've not been to Leeds arena, so I don't I don't know. But I got the impression that there were things that happened there, possibly through design and build contract that upsets the user group. So, they came into the Playhouse saying, we're not going to let you get away with anything that's not that substandard. And by that time all the decisions have been made, it was a very difficult time, they should have been consulted earlier but it didn't happen for some reason. I think we had exemplary solutions, so I wasn't particularly concerned about that. But I spent probably the next six months justifying questions via the council, via the Action Group, via all sorts of people and then actually a second access consultant who was trying to moderate this whole situation. And they were talking about, I think, 20% wheelchair capacity within both theatres. And I said, if you just put wheelchair to wheelchair, you wouldn't get them in. That's a whole, that's like a drive-in theatre for wheelchair users of its own. But it's not one of these theatres, and it's not here. I can't solve that problem for you, all I can tell you is it won't happen; it can't happen. Maybe I wish it could, but I can't wish it into possibility. It's outside my ability. Unfortunately, because buildings are procured in a very odd way, one loses the connection with those groups. So instead of having a sort of ongoing rapport, we were advising different people at different times. And they were also advising different people at different times. We weren't necessarily having shared conversations; I wish we were. But I think it's good to be challenged. And if I've done something wrong, I'll do my best to change it, was hoping. I've sort of taken on board and things that are important.

Rachel: Do you think there are certain situations when an existing building cannot be adapted to improve access without devaluing the heritage of the building?

Peter: Yes, I think that is very true. Because and I suppose I'm to quote another project I'm [inaudible 31:21] whenever it can, it's meant to be opening in April. It's the Grand Opera House in Belfast, which is an 1895 Frank Matcham building. It's been cut about quite a lot, there were two RA bombs that damaged the side of it and affected the interior. It was a cinema; it was going to be demolished because it had no purpose. Thankfully, it was saved. It's a beautiful Indian inspired interior with elephants supporting the roof and box fronts and things. It's quite a magical space. So, it's important it survives, it's had a couple of fires in it as well. So, a lot of the original materials been charged and replaced. So, you have to think about the significance of the material that you're saving and what you can save and also how you adapt what-- And yesteryear was acceptable for accessibility and construction and various things to what needs to be acceptable for today. And I am the-- I think the problem-- I always try and keep the atmosphere of the auditorium and try and keep things reversible so that people can always go back to what was there that one doesn't obliterate something that was there before. So, the tears have been cut about quite a bit in that auditorium previously. And I returned some to nearer what they were before. And they were accepted. But when we came to the detail of level changes and wheelchair positions, the building control inspector caused reverted back to absolutely conditions as written in the regulations rather than the interpretations. And the regulations actually are generally recommendations. And therefore, one should be able to offer, so deemed satisfy solutions. But we didn't have that level of understanding or the conversation there. And the theatre decided in amongst this that some of these wheelchair positions and part of this was providing wheelchairs in more positions than just the stalls that they would actually exclude the option for putting in wheelchair positions. And I tried to persuade them to say, okay, you might exclude them now, but let's make them possible in the future. You know, let's not prevent them being made in the future. But I think the frustration of additional costs, time run-ons, all sorts of site difficulties and COVID and delays they found it too difficult to contemplate and really wanted a much simpler working solution. And at that point-- and I think this is-- No, I don't think I can put blame against anyways. It's a matter of circumstances across all the different disciplines that contribute. But we ended up with less options for wheelchair users, some slightly fewer good positions. I think I held on to the major improvements, but it was like the benchmarking we've done four years earlier where we'd said, this is what we're aiming to achieve, that almost been forgotten and overlooked. And I was really quite heartbroken that we weren't able to do the things that we really needed to. And it was an attitudinal problem rather than a physical problem. But the solutions that we could pursue were almost the best ones we could do without affecting the fabric of the building, and I suppose Had we been able to affect the fabric of the building more, we might actually have done a lot better. And it's a balance, I think it's a balance. I don't think you can throw away the quality of a good building just for one aspect of society.

But I don't think you necessarily need to, but you have to be open to what the solutions that do work. And that make something a huge improvement on what was there before. I think actually even BS8300 still allows that in an existing building. It always used to be that if you couldn't get your 1% of wheelchair positions within an auditorium, you needed to get as many as you could in as many places as you could. But I think the 1% is the minimum and that it's the extra options and the flexibility, the things that you argue over but you're 1% minimum, I think it's the absolute, but you don't lesson.

Rachel: What would you recommend to enhance the education of young architects and designers when approaching accessibility during their studies?

Peter: Well, you [inaudible] who needs assistance and helping them through you know, if one was going to be a specialist in the theatre, one should work front of house. And you should see how people arrive at the theatre, you should watch where they trip, you know, where the carpet edging is rough. And where there's a sort of an odd level change, where there's a ramp that surprises people where something isn't lit, where the signage isn't good. And just watch how people react to these situations. Because in a few nights, you'll see all the problems. And you just need to be aware of them and then remind yourself constantly that this is this is how people are. Why are we doing this? We're doing it for the users, and we want them to be as welcoming and as comfortable as possible. But otherwise, adopt someone who needs assistance and take them shopping or take them to a building that doesn't have good access and you'll learn pretty quickly. I'm miserable it is when you're stuck. You can't even get up, you know [inaudible 38:46] two steps into a space. And what it's also like to be carried in a wheelchair or to be made to be singled out. Because I think that's the stigma, it's about being exposed, having your disability exposed because a lot of disabilities are hidden. And you can protect, not protect yourself but you don't have to admit to them every day at every time you're in public. Because people shouldn't have to do that. And I think it's heart breaking when you know, if you can't hear or you can't see very clearly and something isn't intuitive or clearly indicated, that you have to then ask or say I can't hear that because I'm a bit deaf or my hearing aids not picking up the signal. You know, yeah, we just want everyone to sort of feel not stigmatized by [inaudible 40:04]. And I suppose for architects just to go and experience that first-hand would be a great asset, how you do it, I don't know. But people do sort of voluntary work and go out into the community. And I started front of house. I mean, my ambition was to be a second costume designer. I trained as an architect, but I worked front of house in my holidays, I designed [inaudible 40:28] acted, sang, I did all the things to understand the different users, which helps me to do the job I do now. So, get rich life by experiencing lots of things.

Yeah, I don't know, do you have a program that-- Do you feel your course is lacking in educating you in accessibility needs?

Rachel: I do. And I told them. It's been a discourse, they've sort of asked, I just kind of know-- I can only speak for myself and I know my colleagues are currently studying and researching whatever they want to do. And it's just not common discourse. So, it's very interesting to find out about these consultants in agencies like your own and all initiatives are happening. I think it's very exciting.

Peter: Yeah, I've grown up with this accessibility issues. When I done my sort of part three, I qualified in 86, I think it was. We had a standard template for an accessible toilet. And it was called the disabled toilet, which I've always found a very odd thing because it shouldn't be the same. It's a fully functioning toilet but it's with accessibility needs. And we just copied that out. We used to trace over it or issued as a standard dye line print. And then the then what was the first one? It was DDA was the first thing. So, in the early 200s, 2000s rather-- and did we not have better regulations before that and then the Equality Act? And things are-- there's a lot more we know now than we did. I didn't understand what I do now 30 years ago. But it's simply by dealing with these things on a daily basis that you get the swing of things as I suppose anybody in any profession does. But it's odd when you think back when was the change? When was it vital, we had a minimum of six wheelchair positions in any auditorium? It was about 2002, I think, it’s not so long ago. And before that, yes, there were always wheelchair positions. But they were a convenience rather than a sort of an obligation.

Appendix D: Interview with Toby Johnson, Managing Director at Haworth Tompkins:

Rachel: How do you analyse where accessibility is needed in your projects?

Toby: Well, this sort of baseline is part of the building regulations. And so that would be-- that's obviously the default position. Obviously, with a lot of publicly funded projects, there's a requirement for more extensive disability audit which covers sort of access issues. More why is there physical access but also wider sort of access issues in terms of sort of enabling disabled members of staff, performers, blah, blah, blah, as well as audience members. So, and that tends to be a sort of shopping list of aspirations that will sort of go above and beyond the sort of straight part and box ticking. And it's obviously very much sort of driven by the way the client sort of wants to work and how they want to engage with the disabled community. What charcoal blue would be put the infrastructure within the performance space for hearing impaired audience members, but they don't really go much beyond that in terms of the sort of accessibility side.

Rachel: What design processes do you use to explore the multi-sensory aspects of a proposed project? So how do you deal with design process that's dominated by a sort of visual, I would say that applies to theatre.

Toby: It is becoming more current you know; the audio description performances allow sort of pretty universal and I know the Donmar did a performance in the dark which was a sort of just an all-audio performance sometime during lockdown. To a certain extent, though in terms of the performance space we see ourselves as enablers, you want you want a space that will facilitate whatever a creative mind wants to sort of envisage for it. And that sort of one hope sort of embrace sort of traditional theatre as well as forms of theatre that haven't yet been thought about. And therefore, you know, multi-sensory theatre of any kind is something that you would envisage could be accommodated.

Rachel: Which feature or features of the Young Vic Theatre to pay the most attention to in regard to its accessibility?

Toby: I suppose usually the key, the sort of key to unlock accessibility is a lift and making sure that it connects all the levels of the theatre, obviously, it was a challenge at the young bit, because it was such a sort of long horizontal sight. And as ever, you're working with a very constrained budget. I can't, for some reason we didn't have the plans on our website-- need to sort of check. I can't quite

remember how we achieved the access, because part of the sort of proposals was to create the sort of get round. So, the original auditorium was retained the heart of the scheme and we created a new skin around the outside, I had to get rounds that connected the sort of production offices and the workshop spaces with the front of house spaces. And there was very much sort of idea that everyone uses the front door, whether you're a staff, performer, you don't often the theatre will have the stage door, which the sort of artists and production staff will use are often that split into so you have one door for the artists, one door for the production staff, another door for admin and the public have their own entrance. But at the Young Vic, the idea was everyone comes through the same front door, and then you've got the sort of primary circulation routes. And off that up to the admin offices, which is above the main sort of, for a front of house spaces or across to the right which would take you through to the production spaces. But I would need to check the plans before making sort of unsubstantiated claims about what level of accessibility we achieved.

Rachel: When you design like the backstage behind the actors, what considerations were made there for sort of actors with disabilities?

*(Toby shares his screen to describe plans of the Young Vic)*

Toby: So, you've got the main access point here. Oops. Yeah, so you've got the main entrance here, the lift off the sort of main foyer area, the smallest kitchen in the world. And then you've got the main staircase, main back of house staircase, and then there's a staircase that takes you up to the ground floor. So, the dressing rooms are the kind of back of house, this is the front of house back of house line that sort of follows around there, somewhere. Yeah, that's it. So, you get into the auditorium through that lobby there. And there's a staircase that takes you up to the upper levels. But there is also an access at the balcony level from the first floor. So, I think the-- So you've got a sort of level access. So that line there is the existing blockwork of the auditorium. And this is the new wall line. And these are the sort of get rounds that allow the access from between the back of house sort of production spaces and the sort of main Front of House spaces, oops, just go to the next level up. So, at the mezzanine level, you've got the front of house with the void with main staircase, you've then got level access into the upper level of the balcony. I'm not sure whether there were any designated wheelchair seats up here. But obviously it's all level for disabled. Certainly, through those two doors, I think there might be a step there. And but again, there's from the left, there's a level access that takes you around to the production offices, which sit over the workshops below and then you've got this sort of workshop sort of stage house space that the production offices sit around. So, this this lift

is doing quite a lot of work. But as are these get rounds, particularly this one around the north of the building, has generally that's everything sort of comes back to this name vertical circulation here unless that is the admin offices at the top and then that leads into the sort of annex of the offices, which is in the old butcher shop. And does a sort of further get round to the upper opposite of technical balcony. So, it does look like other than this sort of [inaudible 15:40] that's in the roof of the butcher shop, it is all accessible. What we didn't achieve here was to make the grid itself accessible which is generally quite a challenge. We did do it for a school project in Oxford, the north wall art centre, which was like an educational is a very small educational auditorium. And it was felt that because part of that education was learning about theatre technology, the grid should be accessible as well as the other spaces within the theatre.

Rachel: Do you think designing in response to an impairment such as visual can enhance the sensory experience for more able-bodied users at the building?

Toby: I guess it certainly allows for a sort of richer experience for other users of the building. There's always that sort of argument that if one of your senses are impaired, the others sort of become heightened to sort of compensate and therefore you can pick up things that maybe someone who has no such impairment doesn't. Whether that informs the design, I don't know. We've got a deaf architect who's working with us. And that's been very interesting in terms of the things that-- the way that he sort of interacts with the world. And because, we were saying in a sort of recent review to certain extent if you use some voice recognition software, this kind of remote working could sort of work to your benefit. But he's saying Well, actually, because my language is sign, I'm not very good at reading. Because he's grown up with people signing and that's how he communicates. He hasn't sort of developed what you would have thought was a complimentary tool or is the equivalent to a relationship with the visual world is far more acute. And he's done with a friend of his. He's done a piece of work on signing for architects which as he says is quite a niche. It's not going to sell a huge number of copies because it's been about three deck architects. But he was saying that he's come across a whole load of terms that just don't have sign language sort of equivalent, so have to be spelled out. And so that's a quite an interesting insight.

Rachel: Do you think there are certain situations where an existing building cannot be adapted to improve access without devaluing the heritage of the building?

Toby: We have quite some [inaudible 21:39] attitude to existing buildings. And so, we would normally find a way. And I think as we've demonstrated with the Young Vic, which wasn't actually an existing building but sort of had a lot of constraints. And one lift can give you a lot of access. So back to the Art Centre, we put in two lifts, one lift or two lifts. There's a one lift that sort of is designed to sort of link every floor so that they can shift. The idea of [inaudible 22:37] Arts Centre is that any space can be let out for commercial event, be a performance space or be used for rehearsals. So, there's an awful lot of shifting sort of kit between rooms and setting up seating roster. So, there's this big lift that sort of links and it's got quite a bit of awkward shape shift in half levels. And I'm sure we've got pasture lift as well. In the moment, I can't quite remember where that is. So, and we're just finishing Theatre Royal Drury Lane, which is a grade one listed building. And we've made almost every level accessible, certainly all the primary and public levels are accessible. And previously, I think you could get wheeled into the stalls off Russell Street but there was no level access from the [inaudible 24:02] a to any part of the theatre. Again, actually with one lift and some sort of judicious ramps, you can make a sort of big difference. So, you know, I think there is-- we do quite a lot of conservation management plans. And within conservation management plans, there's sort of-- you do a risks and opportunities assessment. And the risks are those things that will potentially change significant aspects of the buildings and they can be everything from the fact that the fabrics deteriorating and is going to sort of fall off, unless there's some investment to the fact that the use of that building has vanished, and any new uses are going to require sort of radical remodelling. But there's a very good document, is probably about 10 years old, historic English Heritage, now historic England wrote which enshrined the principle that making historic buildings relevant is a key conservation aim. And therefore, a building that that sort of fulfils an active function for the community is going to sort of get investment and it's going to be looked after. So, you weigh some loss of significance in the fabric in order to gain that long term relevance. And obviously making buildings accessible makes them relevant attracts funding, blah, blah, blah. So, I think we would certainly argue that there is always a way to make existing buildings accessible. You just need imagination and a good argument and an understanding Conservation Officer.

Rachel: What would you recommend to enhance the education of young architects and designers when approaching accessibility during their studies?

Toby: I think exposure to disabled people. I think it's sort of humanizing it as something that's important for architects to consider rather than simply annoying box ticking or annoying constraints

on imagination. And I think that can only-- that's most vividly learned by actually engaging with people with disabilities, hearing about the things that work for them and the things that frustrate them.

Appendix E: Interview with Shona Louise, Disability Advocate & Blogger:

Rachel: How accessible is an acting career for a person with a disability?

Shona: Yeah, not accessible to really, I mean, I'm not a disabled actor, but I'm disabled photographer in the theatre industry. So, I kind of get an insight into what it is like, and I've got a lot of disabled friends who are actors as well. And it really depends on the disability. I think if you are able to navigate things like stairs or things like that, then you're pretty okay. But if you're a wheelchair user if you're deaf, if you're visually impaired is just horrendous. It's better in regional theaters across the UK, in my opinion. But the West End is-- I'm in pretty much a no go if you want to be in any backstage areas, because it's hard enough as an audience member, let alone to try and get on the stage. So yeah, I mean, for 2021 it's pretty horrendous.

Rachel: What would be a good example of disability representation within film theater or TV in your opinion?

Shona: So, the one I always talk about is I don't know if you watched it years and years on the BBC, had Ruth [sp] Madly in it. And she does a lot of TV work and in some stages while she's a wheelchair user. And it was great representation because she's amatory wheelchair user, and she can stand up from her wheelchair. And they showed that in the show, which was such a big thing to be seeing on TV. And then also the fact that her disability was, of course part of her character and part of our narrative, but it wasn't the only part. So that is amazing. And I never got to see it. But she was also in a show at the Donmar Warehouse called Teenage deck, which really explore themes of disability to do with Richard the third. So yeah, she's done a lot of good stuff in terms of that.

Rachel: Actually, I think I read about her, she was in a series, was it Don’t Take My Baby?

Shona: Yes, that is the first sort of big thing she did. incredible.

Rachel: She's in there somewhere as well. And, okay, so in your opinion, does design of theater venues play a part in the number of actors with disabilities in the industry? You've kind of covered that, if there's anything else you want to add, but I think you covered that quite well.

Shona: Yeah, it's a massive barrier, and probably the biggest one really. And it's an issue as well because when we talk about access in theaters, we're mostly talking about audience members. And even then, we are getting the bare minimum if that so to go beyond that and make backstage areas accessible dressing rooms, the stage. It's just a whole other subject that the industry does not seem to be ready for yet. Things like steps and massive tall buildings with no lift. And then also dressing rooms being tiny, so you can get wheelchair user in there, that kind of thing. And then for blind and visually impaired and deaf people as well, it's just a minefield, there are so many barriers. And so, people assume it's difficult but actually it's quite easy to sort out in the end. But yeah, I think there are just so many issues that it's not a simple problem to solve, because we are so far behind where we should be.

Rachel: Yeah. And now I'm gonna ask you sort of questions to do the sort of design of theatres and like, your experience going and whatnot. So, it'll seem a bit repetitive but just do your best. Okay in your opinion or experience, can the circulation of a theater venue limits/alienate an audience member or disabilities experience? So, by circulation, I mean, sort of the journey throughout the theater in all its different areas.

Shona: Yeah, definitely. I mean, as a wheelchair user, I can often get into an auditorium usually for a side entrance, done a back alley or something. But there are parts of theatres that I will just never see. I can't go to the bar to get a drink for myself. I can't go and visit the merge stand myself. And whenever I say it to people that are, oh, well, it's not the end of the world kind of thing. But theater as an experience. It's not just what you see on stage. It's a whole environment and the buzz beforehand where everyone's waiting to go in. I don't get that a lot of the time. And so yeah, it's a massive barrier, because, yeah, I might be able to actually see what's going on on stage, but I'm not getting the full atmosphere and experience that everyone else is.

Rachel: And in the same question applying to the auditorium and its seating arrangements. In your opinion, how can someone with a disability be limited or alienated in that scenario?

Shona: Yeah, so a lot of the time as a wheelchair user, my seat is a restricted view, even back at the stores. And so, the dress circle cuts off the top half of the stage, which depending on the show can be a problem. And then quite often, boxes are the other option for myself. I mean, I still come from away in London and the restriction of the view from the only space for a wheelchair user is half the stage. And I've literally couldn't see half of the stage. So, it's things like that. Even when I can get in, I'm getting such a worse deal than everyone else, and I'm not choosing it. If I was nondisabled, perhaps I would choose a really cheap seat and deal with a worse view. But when it's your only option, it's really alienating and, yeah, I mean, my experience that come from away left me, only as it is, when I left, it was horrendous.

Rachel: That's terrible. Question applying to set design performance, do you think lighting or sound can limit or alienate audience members experience?

Shona: Yeah, definitely. I mean, I don't have a lot of sensory issues myself. But things like gunshots, loud sudden noises are issues for me. And if I feel that show me include those kinds of things, I often won't go and see it or I will try and hunt down information online on where in the show, these things might happen. Me and my girlfriends or The Lovely Bones in Oxford, well, if I waited for the first half, because the lighting and sound use was so intense that I was just sat on my hands over my ears the whole time. And I don't have autism, I don't have a sensory condition and yet it was still incredibly overwhelming.

Rachel: And, okay, so that's kind of the theatres [inaudible 00:07:07] past. And now do you think architects having discourse with members of the disabled community, that is through user groups, or through testing, in the initial design process of a theatre would improve accessibility?

Shona: Absolutely. And as someone who advocates for accessibility in the theatre industry, it's what I keep telling everyone, you have to speak to us at the start of the process, there is absolutely no point getting to the end of it, and then going, Oh, someone like myself going, there's this issue, and this issue is too late. By that point, it can't be fixed. If you talk to us at the start, then the problems don't even happen. And that's where a lot of the problems in the theatre industry come from when it comes to disabled people and accessibility. We're just not present anywhere. And so, there is no one to say, Oh, that's not a good idea. And so, these problems become real. And by that point, it's too late to do anything.

Rachel: Yeah. And would you say that modern theatre is more accessible than older theatres?

Shona: Oh, yeah. I mean, there are definitely exceptions. And renovations have made big improvements. I know. The theatre old Gerry lane is making some incredible access improvements at the moment. If they're going to have like 25 wheelchair spaces, five accessible toilets for the oldest working Theatre in London, that's incredible. But that's not the norm for older theatres like that. And it takes a lot of work to renovate them. The other Palace in London, when it was St. James's, burnt to the ground. And so, they restarted and that is one of the most accessible theatres in London for an audience member. And whether you're an actor or working backstage, because everywhere is accessible. And it's really light and day, you can see which theatre is newer and which are older. And that's often why regional theatres are more accessible because they are newer buildings.

Rachel: And what has been your experience in terms of accessibility when it comes to theatres in comparison to other venues? So, the concert or museums and cinemas, what sort of stands out with theatres?

Shona: It's a lot worse, I think theatres hide behind well listed buildings, we're graded, we are trying to predict the architecture and everything like that more so than any other type of venue ever experienced. I've never had a problem going to a concert. I've never had a problem going into a museum. And yet when it comes to theatres, the whole industry hides behind these well listed buildings which is rubbish, because as I say, the Theatre Royal Drury Lane have done it, the Old Vic did it. It takes money but it is possible. But yeah, the whole industry just hides behind it. And so, in terms of everywhere I go, as much [inaudible 00:09:48] theatre, it's where I get my worst accessibility problems.

Rachel: In your opinion, how should the education of young architects and designers be enhanced when approaching accessibility during their studies?

Shona: Talk to disabled people. Yeah. I mean, that's just my advice everywhere really, there is no one better place to tell you what we need and what we want than disabled people ourselves. Even as theatre industry, when we talk about accessibility, people often hire accessibility consultants who aren't disabled themselves. And so, there's a whole bunch of issues that come with that. So yeah, just talk to disabled people, we will tell you exactly what we need. And we're all just waiting to be asked.

Rachel: I'm looking at three specific theatres in this dissertation, I've gone to the Young Vic, Leeds Playhouse and the London Palladium. Have you had experience in those?

Shona: I've had experience in two of them. I've never been to the Young Vic before. I've been to the Palladium. A pretty good experience. I mean, the only big issue for myself is it's quite a raked floor in the stores where the wheelchair spaces and so as a wheelchair user, when you're going around the back to get to your seat, you're so sort of tipped and slanted that it's quite an unnerving experience. That's like a separate entrance as well, which I'm not a fan of, but it's not the worst separate entrance I've ever used really. And then the Leeds Playhouse is one of my favourite venues I've ever been to, it's just outstanding. The work they have done there to improve it just blew my mind. I went there in January of this year and I got see rehearsals for their production of Oliver, which use a lot of disabled actors and I got to tour the whole building and I was just absolutely blown away. I could get literally everywhere. And I just had never experienced that before, which is like it's quite-- it's amazing, but it's also quite sad, that would be my first experience of being able to access every area like I've never been in a rehearsal room before. As a theatre photographer, it's my job and I'd never got into rehearsal room because they're never accessible, so it was just amazing. Yeah. Outstanding venue.