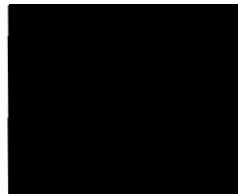


Bethan Sayed AM
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA



November 2nd 2018



Dear Ms Sayed



Subsidised Theatre in Wales

I am the author for Theatre Wales of 869 reviews and articles on theatre and performance. In December each year I write summary articles of our year in theatre. Next month these articles will include the "National Theatre of Wales."

I use inverted commas because these words have meaning and their meaning has been stretched so far as to cease to apply to this company. It stands awkwardly alongside National Opera, Theatr Genedlaethol and National Dance, all admirable and non-contentious representatives of Wales. The company's display across the media of the United Kingdom this season has brought Wales into discredit.

You will be aware of the state of relations between the company and every significant dramatist of Wales, endorsed by the Writers Guild and Equity. Their lack of confidence is principally focused on the programme. The company operates a unique import model among designated national theatres, whereby a large proportion of Wales' public funding is spent on companies, writers and actors from elsewhere.

The weight of protest has been met with silence from the Chair and Board, evasion and distraction the hallmark of other response. However, a second issue also prevails and has been downplayed. The view of the audience member is not that of professional practitioners. The net impact on the theatre ecology is to deprive audiences in Wales of theatre. No numbers are released in the public domain- the policy in Scotland is very different. The sum required to subsidise each audience member may be surmised as the world's highest. The company has now embarked on a sabbatical from theatre for a period known only to itself.

This has an opportunity cost for our theatre of £4000 a day. At the same time tours from companies of a good heritage, who wish to perform to Wales, are being turned down. I do not believe this to be the intended cultural policy of the Government of Wales. The companies who are being terminated have lost heart which gives this issue an immediacy.

I would request the Committee to undertake the actions that are called for. In my own view an open session with Chair and Chief Executive has an urgency to it.

Yours Sincerely

Adam Somerset

ADAM SOMERSET

Theatre-Wales

21 September 2018

Wales Arts Review publishes an open letter to National Theatre Wales signed by the leading Welsh playwrights of the day.

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Dear Clive Jones (Chair of National Theatre Wales),

It is with extreme sadness that we wish to make known our discontent with National Theatre Wales. We feel it is time for a public discussion about the very purpose of the organisation.

The direction of NTW, coupled with a lack of scrutiny, transparency and openness has led to a worrying internal culture which, despite the organisation's name, seems to take pride in ridding itself of a theatrical identity and even its nationality.

Our fears as an artistic community regarding NTW's low theatrical production rate since the departure of John McGrath are an open secret. Despite NTW being in receipt of a regular annual income from ACW of roughly one and a half million pounds, just one project is listed on your website for the remainder of 2018 – an exhibition of photographs taken with disposable cameras in Haverfordwest. And in the company's latest public report to its trustees, just one production is listed for the entirety of 2019.

But for many, it was this spring's show 'English' which felt like a final straw, and which triggered a widespread discussion behind closed doors.

NTW described 'English' as 'an investigation into language and identity'. There is no version of the history of the English language in Wales which is not a history of its relationship with the Welsh language. How those two languages forge our identity is arguably the defining characteristic of our nation. And yet 'English' erased this crucial aspect of the story of English in Wales entirely and deliberately.

It was the open deliberateness of this act which made 'English' a turning point for so many artists in Wales. Its erasure of a distinctive Welsh context was not a mistake. It was not the result of hasty decisions made under the pressure of a limited rehearsal period. It was the result of decisions which NTW leadership had chance to reflect on and consider carefully. Specifically, the decision to employ a Mancunian company to make the show, and the decision to hire a director who admitted in interviews that, as an English-speaking English man, he did not feel equipped to speak about the Welsh language, or Welsh identity.

It is in this context that we wish to provoke a debate about what kind of national theatre we desire. We want it to be a theatre. We want it to be Welsh. These are two things we thought we could take for granted. And yet, despite the uproar over 'English', it is an English company which NTW has entrusted to deliver a flagship project in 2020 – the Liverpool 20 Stories.

We are therefore asking to the board to overhaul NTW's aims and objectives so that –

- **All shows produced by National Theatre Wales have a Welsh or Wales-based artist as primary artist.** This is to insure against the marginalisation of the Welsh experience. And to ensure Wales benefits from the investment of the national theatre with artists returning to their creative community and continuing their careers at home.
- **Non-Welsh and Wales based artists and companies need to be 1) world-class, and 2) engaged only to support a Welsh or Wales-based artist.** The practice of engaging companies and artists outside of Wales to respond to Welsh stories has to end.
- **A National Theatre Wales show has to have theatre in it.** If it's a song then it's a song. If it's a comedy night, then it's a comedy night. But if it's not in some sense theatre, NTW should not be funding it.

We are not provoking this debate for provocation's sake. We wish to work with you to deliver a sustainable, thriving theatre culture that can speak to Wales' diverse communities, and at times to all of them. However in its current incarnation NTW is acting as a roadblock to this goal. It funnels what could be investment in Welsh theatre-makers to companies and artists beyond Wales. It sends out a consistent undermining message, via its work with non-Welsh artists, that Welsh theatre artists are not good enough to tell Welsh stories. Were it not for the success we achieve at home and internationally, without NTW's support, it is something we could easily begin to believe about ourselves. And yet we are successful. Only think how much that success could be inflated with NTW's support.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Harris

Alun Saunders

Branwen Davies

Carmen Medway-Stephens

Caryl Lewis

Daf James

Dic Edwards

Gary Owen

Gary Russell

Jacob Hodgkinson

Jon Berry

Kath Chandler

Keiron Self

Kelly Rees

Kit Lambert

Lisa Parry

Louise Osbourn

Lucy Rivers
Manon Eames
Mari Izzard
Matthew Bulgo
Melangell Dolma
Meredydd Barker
Mike Leitch
Myfanwy Alexander
Othniel Smith
Paul Jenkins
Phil Ralph
Rachel Tresize
Roger Williams
Sam Burns
Sharon Morgan
Sion Eirian
Siwan Jones
Tim Price
Tim Rhys
Tom Wentworth
Tracy Harris
Tracy Spottiswoode
William Roberts