

Large Print Guide



Behind the Mask

*Celebrating 40 years of
Trestle Theatre Company*

Outside West Keeper's Gallery, introduction on diagonal wall

Trestle Theatre Company began as the dream of a small group of performing arts students at Middlesex University, Sally Cook, Paul Gee, Alan Riley, Peter Walsingham, Toby Wilsher, and their tutor at the time, John Wright. As they are for every Company, the beginning years were tough but the group found ingenious ways of securing funding to produce their first shows. At the time Peter and Alan were sharing accommodation above a pub in Potters Bar and Alan recalls how they fundraised to help them get started.

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generated a great degree of interest, excitement and a ticket buying frenzy and if I remember correctly, raised about £100! Not an inconsiderable sum at the time for a fledgling, wannabe theatrical troupe. The amounts produced by the subsequent bottles were much less impressive as over the following three weeks interest waned and the novelty wore off, but as I attempt to recall the story now some four decades later, that act of generosity and willing, collective, support shown to a bunch of young, 'arty farty', performing arts graduates by that community of 'ordinary', local pub folk was impressive in itself and instrumental in Trestle Theatre Company's inception. "

Alan Riley, Founder.

The Company was formed on their graduation in 1981. Peter left shortly after and Joff Chafer joined the Company. The founders of the Company dreamed of travelling around the country with a box of masks and trestle stages on which to perform. This ambition proved too expensive for them to realise straight away but the name stuck as did their dream.

“We sat around John's kitchen table in 1981 throwing ideas around - The Lazzi Squad was considered - but it was our desire to tour 'modern mask theatre' like the Commedia companies on trestle stages that sealed the deal. “

Toby Wilsher, Founder.

They soon developed a distinctive style of storytelling using mask and physical theatre technique and began touring nationally and internationally. Over the next 40 years the Company grew from strength to strength.

This exhibition will take you on a whistle stop tour of the Companies four decades of work highlighting some of the key moments in its history and sharing stories from those who have worked with and benefited from the companies work.

West Keeper's Gallery

To right of door

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In tall case

In January 2003, Trestle Theatre Company were commissioned by the ITV Promotions Unit to make a selection of their trademark masks in the style of some of the days hottest pop stars for the ITV trailers for the 2003 Brit Awards Ceremony which were broadcast throughout February 2003. Here you can see Ms Dynamite and Jamiroquai. Masks of Oasis, The Sugababes, Nelly, Eminem and Pink were also made.

In wall case

In 1991 Trestle entered their longest period of workshops and development yet exploring the use of puppetry, symbolism, thematic instead of narrative styles, imagery and body masks. The outcome was the show, State of Bewilderment. You can see here one of the masks and puppets used in the production. The next ten years included Trestle's first productions using facial masks and half

masks and saw them playing even more with form and narrative structure.

In wall case

This is the first set of workshop masks used by Trestle. They are nearly 40 years old now, so a little worse for wear. They depict a range of characters that could interact well together no matter the combination of masks being used in an exercise. They are made from Celastic. A layer of Plaster of Paris covered the Celastic mould which was then coloured using theatrical make-up sticks. This method was dropped quite quickly because the solvent (acetone) was smelly and the mask makers had to wear protective face masks or work outside.

“The creation of the workshop masks was an important step in the development of the company because it allowed us to offer performance and workshop packages which were popular with venues”

Sally Cook, Founder

Trestle still make and sell a selection of workshop masks from Trestle Arts Base in St Albans. Find out how they're made today in the next room.

In wall case

Here you can see masks from some of Trestle's earlier shows, Hanging Around, School Rules and Top Storey. The early masks were full helmet, cartoon style masks made from fibre glass paste. A long period of workshops in the spring of 1987 enabled experimentation with a mask making material called Celastic which was lighter and

smoother enabling more lifelike characters. Ten performers joined the company for a month's workshop with these new masks resulting in the show Top Storey.

In wall case

The first 20 years of the Company was spent mostly touring both in the UK and internationally. The Company often undertook between 200 to 300 performances a year with numerous workshops and residencies in between. Working with a wide range of artistic collaborators and venue partners Trestle visited places such as Brazil, Egypt, Japan, the Czech Republic, Australia and Europe including a special connection with Holland. You can follow the shows they toured on the timeline in the next room.

“Touring led to some interesting challenges such as getting struck by lightning during an open air performance

and filling in last minute for Toby after his passport was stuck at the Dutch Embassy but getting to work with a huge range of brilliant people, artists, directors, designers, actors, puppeteers, musicians, technicians, orchestras, administrators, and getting to perform and work in some amazing venues from Selborne village hall to the Sydney Opera House are some of my fondest memories of my time at Trestle.”

Joff Chafer, Company member with Trestle from 1982 – 2000.

During this time Trestle also created their first set of workshop masks and acquired Trestle Arts Base in St Albans.

Wall to left of case

For most of its first fifteen years, Trestle was nomadic. Although this was advantageous in some ways, such as establishing an exciting,

seven-year collaboration with Kherson Puppet Company, Ukraine, the Company was constantly shoehorning its operations into various split bases. In 1997, Penny Mayes, the then General Manager, got wind of the fact that under a nationwide initiative by the Government to close mental health hospitals and relocate patients into the community, The Shenley (later Highfield) Park Trust, expertly headed up by John Ely, was charged with closing the Highfield Park estate. Whilst a large part was given over to a new build housing estate, the 100-year-old, derelict Hill End Chapel was put up for tender. Trestle bid against three others and won the option to develop it into a company base and community centre.

Despite the strange, long abandoned equipment and dead pigeons, the building had a warm, inviting and friendly atmosphere. Architect Robert Sansome got to work to turn the derelict shell into a fully functioning, accessible and beautiful venue with auditorium, rehearsal room, mask making

facilities, office space, storage, meeting room and café area while retaining the footprint and external features of the chapel.

The Company was able to secure 1.5 million pounds from one of the first Arts Council of England Lottery Awards to realise the capital project meaning they had to be scrupulous about how every penny of the grant was spent. Another £500,000 was fundraised to ensure that the plans could be realised. As part of the lottery allocation, the Company commissioned two art pieces – ‘Phoenix Rising’ sculpture by Diane Maclean in the foyer and the etched glass panels surrounding the floor in the meeting room called ‘Time Is Time’ by Julian Stocks.

“Since the church had been at the centre of the Highfield Park hospital, it was a landmark for residents and staff and their families and friends and as such, the resulting building needed to be

able to function as a beacon and centre for the new community springing up around it. It is a delight that the building is still being used for weddings, parties and funerals together with a lively cafe. “

***Penny Mayes, Company
Manager 1981 – 2002***

The opening night of Trestle Arts Base, attended by Trestle's Patron Jim Broadbent was a huge success with a large-scale performance parading through St Albans.

In 2002 the building gained an award in recognition of the important contribution made to the City of St Albans and its inhabitants by the Civic Society and a Civic Access Award as 'one of the best examples of disability access provision in the St Albans District', while Penny picked up Semi-Finalist position of the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Awards.

Timeline along corridor

In 1981 Trestle began touring their early works, comic sketches based on a simple situation and performed in full, helmet, cartoon style masks. '*Creche*' was based on the activities of children in a playgroup. '*School Rules*' portrayed the tyranny of the classroom. '*Hanging Around*' observed unemployed youths passing time in a town centre and featured Morris the Mohican, which later became Trestle's company logo. Put together, these three short pieces created an amusing trilogy on the trials and tribulations of growing up. *Hanging Around*, as the trilogy became collectively known, was a huge hit for Trestle, touring to over 10

countries over the span of a decade, including Brazil, Egypt, Japan and the Czech Republic.

In 1984 '*Plastered*' was created, a witty and perceptive study of a rich variety of characters, observed in that best of British institutions – the public house, and later, in the aseptic surroundings of the local hospital's casualty department. Released as Britain's first 2 act, full mask play it was performed over 350 times between 1984 and 1994 in 3 separate tours both at home and abroad across Europe and Australia.

In 1985 Trestle toured '*A Slight Hitch*' this hilarious full mask production focussed on the chaotic nuptials of a naive young couple about to embark on a lifetime of wedded bliss. Combining Trestle's hallmark of colourful characters and high-quality entertainment the show was met with high praise.

In 1987 '*Top Storey*', one of Trestle's most successful full-mask shows, first toured. In it an old man's peaceful retirement was shattered by the return of his brother to the family home after 40 years, sparking off

boyhood memories and the buried emotions of a tragic secret they once shared. With almost 3 years of continuous national and international touring between 1987 and 1990 and a sell-out return tour 6 years later, Top Storey is one of Trestle's most memorable and most loved shows.

In 1988 Trestle were keen to write another drama and so created '*Ties That Bind*', a chilling tale of child abuse. Initially inspired by the novel 'If I should die before I wake' by Michelle Morris. Both masked and unmasked characters were used, and dialogue and film were incorporated for the first time. The set was full of wonderful surprises as, for example when both school and home rotated to become a fairground. An original soundtrack for the show was written by Sally Cook and Toby Wilsher. Ties that Bind proved to be very successful and embarked on a second tour with a new cast in a specially formed touring unit.

In 1989 Trestle were first awarded Annual Status regular funding from Arts Council England.

L'Amfiparnaso was presented in association with the South Bank Centre, London. A light-hearted and little known opera from the 1400s by Orazio Vecchi, L'Amfiparnaso is about the everyday happenings at an Italian restaurant. Trestle's version was a vibrant contemporary spectacle, combining the rich, heart-tugging sounds of madrigals from the 1500s with modern mask theatre and featuring a cast of 12 performers and operatic singers

'Executive Stress' was a funny and compassionate one man show that looked at loneliness and boredom using mime, masks, original music and a clockwork rabbit to create an incredible adventure and no small amount of executive stress! The show was the product of an artistic residency based at Blackfriars Arts Centre Boston and was funded by Lincoln and Humberside Arts and the Arts Council of Great Britain.

In 1990 *'The Edge'* premiered featuring Trestle's trademark mask work and an original soundtrack. The show, set in a sleepy seaside town, explored creative frustration, work

obsession and a writer's quest for a good story. The Edge was awarded Time Out's Best Set Design.

In 1991 '*The Crime of Love* 'premiered after being carefully planned through a period of workshopping during which the use of melodrama and black and white films of the 1950s were explored together with classical Balinese masks. Crime of Love involved the most complicated narrative structure to date and was performed in cinematic style. Instead of helmet masks, most were just facial, closely fitting the contours of the actors faces, realistic in size but with theatrical features. Crime of Love opened in October and undertook a nationwide tour.

In 1992, Trestle opened '*State of Bewilderment*'. Filled with humour, irony and absurdities it followed a man's journey to find what was missing from his life. The show toured numerous times throughout the UK and across Europe, as well as to Australia including performances at the Perth Festival in 1993 and a seven-week sell-out run in 1996 at the Sydney Opera House; a co-production

with the Sydney Theatre Company. Based on the work of the celebrated Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig, *State of Bewilderment* was one of Trestle's most ambitious productions.

In 1993 Trestle developed '*Little Victories*' a unique collaboration with Quicksilver Theatre using puppets by Norwich Puppet Theatre in support of Save the Children. *Little Victories* was a play of personal journeys about the adventures to be had in coming to terms with the concept of mortality and the joys and responsibilities of being a sibling. A surrounding workshop package was offered with the London Workshop Company.

In 1994 as well as three spectacular shows Trestle launched their first workshop mask sets now used across the world in schools and other education, learning and healthcare settings.

'*The Soldier's Tale*' and '*Goblin Market*' were a collaboration with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group performed as a double bill at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as part

of the 1994 London International Mime Festival. In *The Soldier's Tale*, which was based on Stravinsky's modern-day parable of greed, a bankrupt family thought things couldn't possibly get worse until the bailiff sprouted horns, and eyed up more than just their chattels. In *Goblin Market*, which was based on the passionate and evocative poem by Christina Rossetti, men became beasts and nothing was as it seemed. Featuring an onstage 13-piece orchestra, live narration and eye-catching staging, the two shows came together in a musical and visual feast.

In '*Window Dressing*' which also toured this year, a woman arriving in a new town had a chance encounter leading to revelations about herself and her family's past that were best left forgotten. *Window Dressing* turned the spotlight on media exploitation and a family's search for the truth. Using a strong, challenging style of visual mask theatre, it told the story with the humour and dramatic panache Trestle had become renowned for.

Trestle also created '*Running Dogs*' a low-tech show that could be toured to non-

theatrical venues. The show was unashamedly humorous, ribald by nature and hailed as a show for everyone who's ever owned a dog that would be loved by all the family. *Running Dogs* opened at the first international mime festival in Shanghai.

In 1995 the '*House of Straw*' premiered. Following Jim and Diane who found that wherever they turned they encountered ghosts of the past. The house had a story to tell, but did they want to hear it? A ghost story with a difference, *House of Straw* was presented in collaboration with Millstream Theatre Company in 1995.

In 1996 combining masks, text and choreography with music from Bach to Bacharach, '*Passionfish*' explored the choices and uncertainties faced by many in the late 20th century. This was a darkly comic and passionate play that explored themes of time, being adrift and rites of passage. The tour included the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and the Purcell Room, London.

In 1997 having toured most of its productions to Holland over the years, Trestle ran a residency for professional performers in Amsterdam. This was the first stage of a Dutch collaboration that culminated in the creation of '*Fool House*' (Trestle Goes Dutch). Having joined forces with Dutch performers, Trestle created a 'farce of international proportions'. Running a total of 1 hour 40 in full mask and with an original soundtrack, a piece was created that told a story in many languages, a story about different people living under the same roof.

'Beyond the Blue Horizon' also premiered in 1997, a surreal and poetic music theatre piece, with a commissioned score from composer David Horne. Inspired by an extract from the book *Imperium* by Polish travel writer and journalist Kapuscinski it focused on issues concerning care of the environment. The hero turned his back on urban life in search of the answer, finding it in the desert where a stranger teaches him the way to survive in the heat of the day and the cold of the night. He learns that he is part of the

landscape, but never master of it. He learns that he is dispensable.

In 1998 '*Beggars Belief*' premiered taking its starting point from the paintings of Peter Breugel and weaving them into a story about the nature of power, love and the struggle for independence. Created in collaboration with the Kherson Theatre of Ukraine the show featured masks, puppets and live music and toured both the UK and Ukraine.

In 2000 the new millennium saw the beginning of three new pieces for Trestle and their Ensemble company.

A play-within-a-play, *Bitter Fruit* had at its heart the retelling of the myth of Hephaestus, god of fire and forge. The offstage antics of actor-manager Piota and his cast of actors and musicians formed the principal drama of the show, as lust and jealousy threatened to tear the company apart, spilling onstage in a shocking finale that blurred real life with fantasy. The tour included a performance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London.

'Island' recreated the final expansive moments of Mildred Thomas; an imaginary life that was full of perverse fate, missed opportunity and abandonment. Wild fantasy and grim reality merged in this humorous and moving story about chance, life choices and the isolation prevalent in people's lives at the start of the 21st century. Island toured three times over a three-year period throughout the UK and Holland.

In the hands of Trestle, '*The Barretts of Wimpole Street*' became an offbeat and haunting production about an insular family slowly falling apart. This was the first time that Trestle had worked with an existing script, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* by Rudolf Besier and integrated masked and unmasked characters. The production won the Stage Award for Acting Excellence (Best Ensemble) at the 2000 Edinburgh Fringe Festival

In 2001 Trestle's first production using half-masks was created giving masked characters a voice. As a boy, Lambert Simnel was taught to forget that he was ever anything other than a prince, yet he would spend the rest of his

life trying to forget that he was ever anything other than an ordinary man. Set in 1507 in the heart of the royal kitchens, '*Blood and Roses*' recounted the life story of this pretender to the throne of Henry VII.

Trestle Young People's Theatre Company was launched in March 2001 as they prepared for their new Arts Base in St Albans.

In 2002 Trestle Arts Base had its Grand Opening on 30 May including a large-scale community promenade show.

'The Adventures of the Stone heads' was performed as part of the National Theatre's Transformation Season telling the story of an eccentric and colourful family and their quest to survive when they were washed up on an unfamiliar shore.

In 2003 Trestle launched the first of many Skill Train courses, which ran for the next seven years, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and later the Paul Hamlyn Trust, *Skill Train* was a scheme for young, unemployed people, using theatre craft skills as a means of improving presentation and confidence and

preparing them for work. For 16 weeks, the students worked with professional practitioners towards staging their own production and learnt about; writing, theatre technology, set and costume design and marketing the show as well as performing in it!

“Tonight, we Fly” presented Marc Chagall in all his colourful glory. Centred around Chagall himself the production used an exciting mix of masks, puppets and live Klezmer music to, quite literally, bring the man and his pictures to life. From his turbulent beginnings in a burning town to becoming one of the most celebrated artists of the 20th century, *Tonight We Fly* was a co-production between Trestle and Watford Palace Theatre.

This year also saw Trestle commissioned by ITV to create a series of full head masks to appear in the advertising campaign for the 2003 Brit Awards. Mask maker Russell Dean and the company created a series of ten masks depicting a range of popular artists, including Pink, Oasis and the Sugababes. The advert was filmed on location at Trestle Arts Base, and starred members of the

company in mask, performing as the musicians.

In 2004 the last remaining founding member of Trestle, Toby Wilsher left the company and Emily Gray was appointed as Artistic Director. A new era for the company followed which saw Trestle focus on bringing Trestle Arts Base to life and developing new forms of physical storytelling theatre, working closely with local and international partners to broaden their expertise and reach.

Supported by the Wellcome Trust "*The Smallest Person*" was the first Trestle production directed by Emily Gray. The production told the true story of 19½ inch tall Caroline Crachami and her short-lived celebrity in Georgian England alongside that of a contemporary family seeking a cure for their seriously ill son. Medical ethics and moral dilemmas brought the two stories together with rationality and sentiment doing battle in the name of medical science.

In 2005 Trestle started a professional programme of performances at Trestle Arts

Base alongside running regular community groups throughout the building and fully opening the Trestle Gallery Café.

Trestle launched their first large scale community project “*Human/Nature*” bringing together a variety of local community groups and a team of professional artists. A series of creative workshops led to performances at Trestle Arts Base of a moving and evocative show exploring identity, belonging and choices through the lens of both the disabled and non-disabled participants and artists. Of the sixty participants involved in the workshops, forty performed live in the final production and others participated via video material projected onto screens. This project was a wonderful celebration of local communities working together and was the seed that led to their future inclusive groups.

2005 also saw the creation of *Story Tent* by professional storyteller and artist Kathryn Holt at the invitation of Trestle Theatre. *Story Tent* is an interactive storytelling session, with craft, where parents and preschool children come to

imagine, play and create together, still currently running at the Arts Base.

Written by the award-winning Diane Samuels (Kindertransport), *“Beyond Midnight”* toured telling a familiar story in unfamiliar ways. Cinderella was dead and the glass slipper was back bringing the audience into a world beyond Happily Ever After!

In 2006 following the success of Trestle’s first community project the previous year, the Big Spring Project once again brought local people together through the arts. This exciting and unique arts event, involved over 50 local people aged 9 – 84 years old collaborating with arts professionals through theatre-based workshops and performances. They presented their final show *‘Left Luggage’* at Trestle Arts Base in March. This project formed part of Trestle’s growing ‘Making Space at Trestle’ programme – providing creative opportunities for local people.

In 2007 the first Trestle Un-masked production *“Little India”* was developed. Trestle Un—masked was a series of

international collaborations focussing on physical storytelling exploring Trestle's practice out of mask. The show told a tale of love, loss, mischief and mayhem. Based on an episode from the ancient Indian epic, the Mahabharata, the production told the story of Shakuntala, a part celestial woman of the forest who bears a son by the city dwelling King Dushyanta. Abandoned by the King, Shakuntala is forced to raise her boy, Bharata, alone. Little India was born out of a collaboration with Indian Theatre Company, Little Jasmine, who were resident with Trestle in 2006, exploring classical techniques used in contemporary performance. This re-imagining of the Shakuntala myth was told through physical and visual languages incorporating Kalaripayattu (Kalari) - a powerful, dance like South Indian martial art, Konnakol (rhythmic patterns) and mudras (hand gestures).

Trestle's third Big Spring Project culminated in an interactive theatrical art event "The Secret Ingredient". Trestle Arts Base was transformed into a magical, colourful exhibition. Created over 10 weeks

there were daily live performances inside the exhibition featuring Trestle performers and participants and audiences were also able to visit the exhibits at their leisure throughout the day. Based on the theme of food, the performances and the exhibition explored stories and symbolism of food within different cultures, its place at the heart of communities and how it both connects and divides people.

In 2008 Trestle's second International collaboration took place this time with Barcelona based dance company Incredación Danza. "*Lola: the life of Lola Montez*" was created. The show told the true story of the infamous 19th century Spanish dancer who stormed her way through life on a tumultuous journey of seduction, sorrow and success. An actress and courtesan, a revolutionary and adventuress; she was a breaker of hearts and the toppler of a kingdom. Fusing theatre, dance and live music from renowned flamenco guitarist Ricardo Garcia, this was a "racy, pacey and inventive chamber-sized physical theatre production based on this extraordinary woman's life." – The Times. The show toured in the UK and in Barcelona

'The Mirror Project' was Trestle's widest reaching community arts event to date and captured the ideas and imaginations of the individuals, businesses and community organisations within St Albans. Trestle worked with different community groups as well as professional artists to come up with ideas for temporary public art installations that appeared throughout St Albans in Spring 2008. The art installations intrigued and inspired everyone who encountered them, provoking them to (re)consider how they saw themselves and St Albans. People were encouraged to interact and make responses to these installations and an exhibition at Trestle Arts Base called 'Mirror Mirror' ran from 4 March to 28 April.

This year also saw Trestle develop their popular CPD training for teachers into a collaboration with Middlesex University leading on the Drama strand of their MA Education, a partnership still running today.

In 2009 Trestle's third international collaboration, *The Glass Mountain* was developed with performers from Gardenizia and Piesn Kozwa, telling the story of Polish

immigrant Olek and his journey, through physical and vocal techniques. This exciting international production wove together the Polish fable of The Glass Mountain with contemporary stories of migration. Inspired by Eastern European traditions of singing stories and expressed through original music and physical performance, this was a hopeful and heartfelt tale about what it is to journey into the unknown. The Glass Mountain was supported by The Courtyard, Hereford and the Polish Cultural Institute.

'Out of Sight Out of Mind?' was a promenade production at Trestle Arts Base examining the history and heritage of Hill End Hospital. The play was created and performed by members of Trestle's Youth and People's Company, alongside professional actors, writers, designers, and directors. The piece took you on a journey through the buildings, along the corridors and into the minds of the patients and staff who lived and worked at the hospital over a 100-year period. From the hospital's inception as a mental health facility, through its remarkable history during World War II, and its final controversial closure in the 1990s.

In 2010 Trestle embarked on producing two creative projects with emerging Companies, the first, 'Moon Fool: Ill met by moonlight' was an inventive re-imagining of Shakespeare's well-loved play, A Midsummer Night's Dream. In this engaging, funny and visually striking production, Titania, Oberon and Puck played out events from their past, hosting nightly revels in their attempt to woo audiences off the path and back into the woods. Combining original music and playful movement, Moon Fool was the fairies' tale with an amplified twist.

2010 also saw St Albans mark the celebration of the Magna Carta and the city's role as one of the five designated Charter Towns. To celebrate this event, Trestle's People's Company presented a fascinating production entitled '*Twelve Fifteen*' based on themes from the Magna Carta. Through a mix of physical theatre, text and stunning ensemble movement, ideas of justice, politics, class and human rights were explored. Written by acclaimed playwright Anna Reynolds, Twelve Fifteen was devised and performed by a large

cast of all ages. This very funny and often moving, modern day epic guided the audience through a vibrant landscape of unruly teenagers, pompous dog-walkers, a heroic Police Community Support Officer and a Greek chorus of high-viz-jacketed townspeople. As the story reached its climax in court, the audience turned jury, and one girl's future was changed forever.

'Burn My Heart' was presented by Trestle in collaboration with Blindeye, the human rights theatre company. Two boys' lives were changed forever, as their friendship and loyalty were blown apart by fear and betrayal. Set during the Mau Mau uprising in 1950's Kenya and the ensuing bloody State of Emergency, *Burn my Heart* examined themes of terror, division, and freedom. Based on the novel by award winning writer Beverley Naidoo and adapted by translator and playwright Rina Vergano, it used African and European music and movement styles through a powerful mix of text, compelling storytelling and physical theatre, to tell this fast-paced, devastating, and highly relevant story.

This year Trestle partnered for the first time with St Albans' Arts and created the promenade production of *'Spit and Polish'* around the Town Hall.

In 2011 Trestle adjusted from being a core funded Arts Council Company to a project funded organisation and underwent a company restructure to ensure that new work could be created.

"The Birthday of the Infanta" is a short story by Oscar Wilde, which tells of the events arranged to entertain the Infanta, the Spanish princess, culminating in a performance, an ugly boy, and the way in which their meeting affects both their lives forever. In an age of supreme superficiality, Trestle's version of this piece explored how we value inner generosity and beauty. The Birthday of the Infanta united key members of the creative teams behind Trestle's last four years of work exploring dynamic cultural influences and the extraordinary bond between performer and audience. In this vibrant one woman show, Trestle collaborated with Ramón Baeza,

director of Incredación Danza, choreographer on Trestle's production of Lola: The life of Lola Montez.

"The Man With the Luggage" followed a man striving to return home, in search of his past, hopeful of his future, and longing for those he left behind. As his journey unfolded, he found his path repeatedly blocked and his identity endlessly questioned. His luggage and his status were lost as borders were crossed, languages confused, and modes of travel conspired to thwart him. Informed by contemporary stories of migration and repatriation, *The Man with the Luggage* explored our relationship with home, with nationality, and with authority. Trestle Unmasked used an agile mix of text, movement, music, and projection, to tell a dashing and deeply moving story where notions of time, space, and memories merged to create a dreamscape of great insight, passion, and humour. It illuminated the struggles that face many of today's displaced people, and spoke to everyone who has ever been stranded in a foreign land.

“The Snow Queen” was presented by Unicorn Theatre with Emily Gray working as Movement Consultant. Based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen, this telling was developed by Indian writer, Anupama Chandreshekar, supported by the British Council through Connections through Culture UK-India. Trestle then worked with the Snow Queen director Rosamunde Hutt, the British Council out in India and the show’s creative team to transform the show into a touring production and take it to south India in August 2012, along with an extensive programme of school’s workshops and teacher training. This show then toured the UK in 2013.

In this year Trestle was also a partner in the St Albans Festival with St Albans District Council. This collaboration included performances, storytelling, craft workshops and the celebration of Trestle’s 30th Birthday.

In 2012 Trestle received the St Albans Mayor’s Pride Award for Cultural Innovation and performed in half mask at the ceremony.

Platform, a visionary youth arts hub for 13-19-year olds based in the old Hornsey Road Baths in Islington, London opened. Trestle was a partner in the CIC organisation which set up Platform between 2011-13. The vision for Platform was to be youth led; for the first year Trestle facilitated the arts programme supporting youth led events and cross art form sessions led by professional artists.

In 2013 Trestle's Half Mask set was created and the subsequent performance "The Deadlies". Trestle developed *The Deadlies* in partnership with York Theatre Royal's 'On Our Turf' project working with two local professional actors and community groups in Selby, Pocklington, Helmsley and Easingwold. The story followed Archie as he encountered the different, masked seven deadly sins.

This year also saw Trestle work with Andy Serkis and the Imaginarium to create a series of 16 clear masks that were designed to streamline motion capture pre production in film.

In 2014 Trestle became the first recipient of the Creative Heart of Flame Award for most innovative Business in Hertfordshire. The Flame Award followed another proud achievement by Trestle Mask Maker, Joseph Arm, who was a Young Business Person of the Year Finalist at the St Albans Chamber of Commerce Community Business Awards.

Trestle continued it's work supporting emerging companies through collaboration with Keely Mills and Concert Theatre, both of whom received artistic mentoring and went on to commission Trestle to create masks for their shows 'You Can't be Surprised by a Selfie' and 'Rites of Spring/Romeo and Juliet'

The Company also oversaw the creation of a Trestle Mask Module in the Trinity College Performance Arts Exam syllabus

In 2015 "*Yarico*" the Musical directed by Trestle's Artistic Director Emily Gray and produced by John and Jodie Kidd ran at The London Theatre Workshop. This powerful and epic new musical of forbidden love, betrayal and redemption was based on true events.

Yarico followed the story of a seventeenth century Amerindian woman that saved the life of a British merchant who then sold her into slavery on Barbados. The Yarico Education Programme was then developed by Trestle, funded by Arts Council England and The Beaverbrook Foundation. The programme included a schools' version of the production and workshop programme that went on to be delivered in schools across the world until 2020.

Trestle also delivered their first Arts On Prescription project in 2015 with St Albans District Health and Wellbeing Partnership.

In 2016 the Trestle Mask Makers launched Masks Sets in new tonal variations. The team also created a series of ventriloquism masks for actress and comedienne Nina Conti; these masks toured with Nina to the USA, after a brilliant Edinburgh fringe run and a UK national tour. Trestle also made two screen appearances featuring on the BBC's Artsnight and Flog It! programmes, both of which were filmed at Trestle Arts Base.

Throughout 2016, Trestle Arts Base was home to “*Hertfordshire’s Hidden Heroines*”, a Heritage Lottery Funded project which rediscovered and celebrated nearly 100 inspiring, pioneering and ground-breaking women of the county from Boudica to the present day. The permanent legacy includes oral histories of nearly 30 women, films, exhibitions and a book. Over 600 school students from 9 different schools, 3000 people from Hertfordshire communities, and 17 volunteers gave us over 200 hours of their time to research, interview and preserve these invaluable and often untold histories through workshops and performances. The project legacy continues through the hertsmemories.org.uk website, where anyone can add to the database of role models.

Trestle delivered the very first *M-ask* Wellbeing Drama Programme in partnership with Dacorum Borough Council using drama techniques as a tool to support young people struggling with stress, anxiety, depression and other conditions affecting mental wellbeing.

In 2017 Trestle were commissioned by the University of Bedford to develop their engaging production of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to be toured around schools. This adaptation of Robert Louis Stephenson's popular novella, by Carl Miller, was developed specifically to support students in their study of the work for GCSE English. Using half mask and text from the original novella, the performance focussed on the question of duality that lies at the heart of the book. After a successful Bedfordshire tour, this toured UK schools in 2018.

Trestle also celebrated 15 years of Trestle Arts Base with their 15 Festival including a series of free events, workshops and performances. From this Trestle grew their outreach programme by launching their "*School of Drama*" running 4 weekly classes for young people aged 4-18.

In 2018 Trestle launched their first Inclusive Group, *SING OUT!* providing weekly singing sessions at the Arts Base for adults in the local community aiming to combat social isolation and provide a creative outlet for all.

Over the next two years this was closely followed by launching ACT UP! and DANCE NOW! These three weekly sessions cover acting, singing and dancing and continue to run at Trestle Arts Base attended regularly by around 60 participants and their support workers.

Trestle also contributed to the Cardboard Citizens and St Albans Arts Team's 'Squatlife' Project by partnering with VIDEOfeet Productions to create the legacy film 'INVISIBLE' featuring the stories of the local homeless community and aiming to break down the barriers of perceived perceptions about homelessness.

In 2019 Trestle were commissioned by St Albans Museum and Gallery to create '*Dyad*', a dance and physical theatre exploration of the work of Barbara Hepworth in response to their exhibition with UH Arts.

Rachel was developed and toured in partnership with Small Nose Productions. Small Nose and Trestle wove together intricate full mask theatre with elements of

clowning, to share this incredibly moving performance of Rachel, the story of Mrs Rachel Levy, a Holocaust survivor. With great generosity, Rachel gave Small Nose Productions her story. Rachel lived through Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and Bergen-Belsen; her resilience and survival from the worst horror our world has ever seen is extraordinary. Small Nose and Trestle were immensely proud to deliver this production into theatres, schools and community spaces, to pass on the gift of Rachel's story to as many people as they could reach. This was Emily Gray's final production as Artistic Director as she moved on from the company later in the year. A company restructure followed and Clare Winter and Helen Barnett were appointed Executive and Creative Directors.

In 2020 '*Pageant Fever*' was presented in collaboration with St Albans Museum + Galleries and University City London. A cast of professional actors and Trestle's School of Drama participants brought to life historic St Albans Pageant scripts for one night only celebrating the history of St Albans.

Shortly after we sadly saw the Arts Base shut its doors for a short while due to the impact of Covid 19. However, the team soon moved engagement online and continued to deliver their regular community workshops and training. They also developed a series of lockdown challenges to keep people creative during the first National lockdown. Throughout the year they continued to deliver community projects such as their Cultural Communities project as part of the Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020 and the Creative Minds project in partnership with Mind in Mid Herts.

East Keeper's Gallery

Wall to right of corridor

The appointment of Artistic Director, Emily Gray began a new era of transformation for the Company in 2004.

"One of my biggest challenges in taking on the artistic directorship of Trestle was to evolve the Company from a predominantly mask based touring company to a building based physical theatre company that could serve the needs of its surrounding community and the wider arts sector locally, nationally and internationally."

Emily Gray, Artistic Director 2004 – 2019

The following 15 years saw the growth and development of Trestle's community work. Further exploration of Trestle's physical storytelling style through the Trestle Unmasked programme and international

residencies, the development of a workshop set of half masks and a focus on creating work that supports people's mental health and wellbeing through social prescribing projects.

Trestle's Mask Making Process

All Trestle's masks are made out of the Mask Department at Trestle Arts Base by our full-time mask makers. From here our small team hand craft each mask, vacuum forming, cutting, sanding, and painting each one by hand. Each mask is made from a clay mould that our mask makers design and create for every new set or commission. There are 3 main rooms in the mask department, the vacuum former room, the spray room and the main workshop.

The moulds used in the vacuum form process are made from resin cast from the original clay. Each year there are roughly 600 sets of masks made and dispatched all over the world by our team.

The Mask Masking Process

Stage One

We heat up the vacuum former to 100 degrees which takes approximately 40 seconds.

We select one of our pre-made resin mask moulds.

Stage Two

The mask mould is placed into the vacuum former and the tray is lowered. We place the sheet of 2mm HIPS plastic into the machine and secure it in place, checking that there is an air tight fit.

We pull the heating elements over the plastic and leave for approximately 40 seconds or until the plastic is soft and has just started to dip in the middle. We remove the heating element and raise the tray with the board on

and turn on the vacuum pump. After about 20-30 seconds we see that the plastic has taken to the contours of the mould. We lift the plastic off the mould and let it cool for a moment.

Stage Three

We cut out the mask from the remaining plastic with a saw, leaving the offcuts to be recycled back into sheets of plastic by our supplier.

Our moulds have indents where the eye and elastic holes should be, therefore it is quite easy for us to drill these holes, using an 8mm drill for the eye holes and a 6mm drill for the elastic holes.

The Masks are hand cut to shape and all holes and rough edges are filed smooth.

We also sand around the edge of the mask so that it is smooth and comfortable to wear.

Stage Four

Finally, we finish off the mask by hand painting the features with black spray paint.

This dries very quickly.

Stage Five

Once all eight masks of the basic set are made, we package them up safely in a Trestle box along with elastic, foam pads and our resource pack.

In wall case

Between 2007 and 2011 Trestle undertook three international residencies with creatives and companies from India, Spain and Poland.

The Indian story theatre residency in collaboration with Little Jasmine inspired three shows: Shakuntala (toured India), Little India (toured UK) and The Snow Queen (toured India & UK).

The Spanish dance theatre residency in collaboration with Incepción Danza inspired Lola; the Life of Lola Montez (toured UK and Spain) and The Birthday of the Infanta (toured UK & Spain)

The Polish vocal theatre residency working with performers from Gardenizia and Piesn Kozwa inspired The Glass Mountain (toured UK) and Ill met by Moonlight (toured UK)

“The International Residencies brought Trestle Arts Base to life with artists from across the world sharing their skills with

UK performers, designers, dancers, musicians, directors and teachers, taking their stories into local schools and engaging communities with new ways of making physical storytelling theatre. “

Emily Gray, Artistic Director 2004 – 2019

Since the residencies, Trestle has used the physical languages they learnt to educate and stimulate teachers and artists across the UK and internationally. Here you can see imagery of the residencies and an enchanting puppet used in the Birthday of the Infanta production.

Community has always been at the heart of what Trestle Theatre Company do and having the Arts Base allowed Trestle to develop more large-scale projects and performances involving the local community. The community engagement work at the Arts Base has transformed and changed like the rest of the company starting as the Trestle Young People's Theatre and The People's Company and becoming the Trestle School of Drama and Trestle's Inclusive Groups but the desire to offer quality, community focused artistic work has always stayed the same.

“It was an amazing opportunity to be involved in a series of intergenerational projects with Trestle. They were all so different but the experience of each of them was wonderful... Trestle has nurtured creativity in so many people. “

Kathryn Holt, storyteller, performer and member of Trestle's People's Company

Some of the larger performances Trestle have created in collaboration with the local community and community groups have included, Spit and Polish, Human / Nature, Left Luggage, The Secret Ingredient, Mirror Mirror, Twelve Fifteen, Out of Sight Out of Mind and Herts Hidden Heroines. Here you can see a mask made to depict Boudicca as part of the Herts Hidden Heroines project that produced 40 workshops engaging participants of all ages and abilities, an exhibition that toured to three museums, two films, a show and a book. The book is also featured.

Following Trestle's international residencies, the company continued to explore the marriage of mask and physical theatre using the movement and vocal work they'd developed to create a series of half mask productions and their half mask workshop set.

Here you can see several masks from the set which are characterised based on theatrical archetypes. The Fool, The Devil and The Hero. The Hero was used in Trestle's 2017 production of Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde to represent Dr Jekyll. Some of the half masks also featured in the Yarico Education Project performance.

Trestle continued to explore form with their most recent production Rachel combining verbatim text from Rachel's own voice, full masks, live Yiddish singing and a flavour of Small Nose Productions theatrical clown technique. You can see one of the masks made especially for the show [here](#).

In desktop case

Trestle hasn't only made masks for its own productions and workshops programmes. Over the years they have worked with many companies and artists to develop masks from a shared idea to a Marquette (a small model used to test out the 3D elements of the mask) to the clay mould and finally to the fully realised version. You can see here the process of a commission for the character Hector in the NMTAutomatics production, *Tempus Fugit* performed at the British Museum in 2020.

In recent years Trestle has also produced masks for ventriloquist Nina Conti and masks designed to streamline motion capture pre-production in film for Andy Serkis and the *Imaginarium*. You can see examples of both here.

Outside gallery

Since 2019 the Company has been headed up by Creative Director Helen Barnett and Executive Director Clare Winter. Today Trestle still works to the same artistic principles of accessible creative opportunities for all, putting mask and physical theatre at the centre of a playful and open process. They define their activity into three strands, Our Masks, Our Work and Our Venue.

OUR MASKS

Trestle make and sell 4 different types of masks sets in varying skin tones-with accompanying resources. Each mask set is handmade to order by their two mask makers in the workshop at the Arts Base. We also make bespoke masks for performances and work on commissions. Our latest project is to make our first ever scaled down mask set suitable for Primary School Children.

OUR WORK

Training and Education is at the core of Trestle's creative work providing opportunities for people to learn and

understand new ways of creating theatre and storytelling. This currently includes.

- A wide range of workshop opportunities to primary and secondary schools including mask, physical theatre and bespoke residencies.

“We saw so many reactions, unseen communication, fears and creativity from our students on the day – which we can now build upon in the future to improve their enjoyment, communication and accessibility to all subjects, activities and daily life”

Teacher at a Specialist School for Communication after a day of Mask workshops

- Professional development for teachers and arts practitioners, including MA, PGCE and CPD training.
- High quality mask and physical theatre performances for schools and community spaces.

Trestle is passionate about providing creative experiences and training opportunities for local audiences. Currently this includes.

- 4 weekly sessions at Trestle Arts Base for children and young people aged 4-18 through their School of Drama programme and 3 weekly inclusive groups for approximately 60 adults with physical and learning disabilities and their support workers, Act Up! Dance Now! And Sing Out!

“What I like about Trestle School of Drama is the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends and the fact that people are always there to support you and you don’t ever feel like you don’t fit it. “

School of Drama Participant

- Regular community projects across the county of Hertfordshire such as Herts Hidden Heroines and their Cultural Communities Project as part of the

Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020 which focused on promoting inclusion and engagement in the arts.

“Without groups to access my world becomes very small. I become isolated and sad. I am unable to access my local community without support. Act Up! Has helped me build my confidence. Maintain my speech. Meet new friends and improve my mental and physical wellbeing.”

Participant of Act Up!

- Social Prescribing programmes. Over the last 5 years Trestle have delivered 10 programmes of work specifically targeted for those struggling with their mental health. These provide a creative outlet and a form of expression whilst using their masks and performance technique as a tool to discuss emotions and to give voice to the participants. Trestle have worked closely with Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans District Council and Mind in Mid Herts on these programmes.

“Over time the whole group with its different personalities and ages, learnt how to positively engage with and respect each other. They demonstrated this by showing that they’d learnt how to listen to each other and to value each other’s contributions.”

A Counsellor Case Study Observation from our M- ask Wellbeing Programme

OUR VENUE

Trestle Theatre Company run Trestle Arts Base as a friendly and accessible arts venue with step free access, free parking and accessible facilities offering community engagement, skills development and training. It is a key hub for the area including a café that displays work by local visual artists and providing a home for a wide range of activities from performances, to life drawing classes, to special events.

“The beating heart at the centre of St Albans artistic life.”

A local participant attending the celebration event for our 15th Birthday at the Arts Base

To keep up with what Trestle Theatre Company are up to or what's on at Trestle Arts Base you can follow Trestle on all the usual social media platforms @trestletheatre or go to www.trestle.org.uk

