

Written evidence submitted by Phizzical Productions Limited

Tomorrow's stories told today

Phizzical is a dance, film and theatre company with bases in Coventry and Leicester. We commission and produce unique South Asian arts and cultural experiences. Our entertaining work challenges the status quo and empowers the next generation. Our vision is to create adventurous, brave and colourful work, informed by global stories. We seek to promote equality by working with our communities to bring new perspectives to their stories and influence the changing landscape of theatre.

One of our biggest productions was the national tour of *Bring on the Bollywood* produced in association with Belgrade Theatre Coventry and Vivacity Key Theatre Peterborough. With a turnover of £650k, it ensured a British South Asian musical could entertain communities in places like Cornwall, Doncaster, Ipswich and York who would not normally have access to joyful, entertaining and vibrant South Asian arts and culture.

Phizzical had a two-week programme of activities planned from late March to early April 2020. We were also selected to showcase a new Bollywood musical at an industry showcase. The cancellation of all activities and events had a significant financial impact. Instead, co-producers and venues who would have attended the showcase and booked our work are focused on supporting (or laying off) their staff and revising their business models which require them to generate at least 60% of their income from sales, to become even more resilient. We had invested over 70% of our resources and all our reserves into these projects. The cancellations meant we have no chance of recouping our investment.

As a small and flexible organisation that is project funded, we are not eligible for government support schemes such as the business rates relief. Our base in Leicester is within a charitable organisation's building and our office in Coventry is within a residential property. Emergency support from Arts Council England has mitigated some of these losses for which we are very grateful.

IMMEDIATE & LONG-TERM THREAT TO ARTISTS AND PRODUCERS OF DIVERSITY LED WORK

Diversity led arts, culture and film are generally seen as audience development activity for most theatres. Therefore, we are anxious and urging for greater investment because:

- Our South Asian audiences appear to have a higher risk of becoming infected with Covid-19. They are anxious about visiting theatres and cinemas. We

know this after consultation with a broad range of UK based participants of all ages, economic circumstances etc. during a weekly Bollywood singalong game we host online to promote positive wellbeing.

- Some of our venue partners may never re-open. Those that survive and re-open will focus on a commercially successful programme. Programming BAME or disability led work is generally considered to be an audience development activity. Therefore, it requires a greater financial investment, expertise of their staff and freelancers to ensure that audiences have access to a broad range of high-quality work. Diversity led work may not be their priority until late 2022 or 2023.
- We have a five-year slate of projects at different stages of development. We are reordering the shows we intend to produce to have a small chance to secure co-partnerships or to be programmed by venues. This requires immediate time and financial investment to push forward these works.
- If there is no work to offer them, the small pool of talented South Asian performers and creatives will leave the sector to stabilise their financial circumstances and ensure their survival.

WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Direct communication and consultation with the sector are vital. Clear guidance on rehearsal, backstage and presentation practices need to be formulated with the sector to reduce public anxiety. Clarity on the timing for the lifting of the lockdown will enable us to plan better. To remount an existing show needs at least 6 months planning whereas creation of new work takes longer.

Both types of the aforementioned productions need financial injection which is limited at this time. For a small company like Phizzical, funding comes from a portfolio of public subsidy (56%), sponsorship from other businesses, donations from individuals, co-producing cash and valuable support-in-kind and guaranteed box office sales. In this climate, securing sponsorship and donations will be very difficult and our reliance on public subsidy will be greater.

The Arts sector, in particularly smaller diversity led producing companies need support until April 2021 at the very least. The survival of these companies will address the sector's long-term agenda of:

- Supporting BAME talent development – in particular from South Asian communities who are under-represented in the sector as evidenced in the Centre Stage report commissioned by Andrew Lloyd Webber in 2016.
- Empowering venues and co-producers to be brave in their approach to diversity.
- Enabling innovation and nurturing the ambition of BAME led companies to create mid-large-scale work that can be commercially successful

- Diversified portfolio of the stories available for presentation on British stages all year round to ensure that all communities have access to world cultures as part of their lives
- Ensuring diversity leadership is retained and it is able to thrive as a positive example to the global sector

Almost all of Phizzical's work begins in studio theatres or small arts centres such as Belgrade Theatre Coventry's B2 Studio (256 capacity), the Attenborough Arts Centre in Leicester (50 capacity on a good night). For emerging artists and companies, small scale theatres like Tara Arts in London are vital to their existence. We also partner with UK Asian Film Festival organised by Tongues on Fire Limited to ensure independent South Asian films are made accessible to audiences nationally. We work cinemas like Rich Mix, Harrow Arts Centre and Regent Street Cinema in London, Phoenix Cinema and Art Centre and Square One Cinema within University of Coventry to ensure they are able to serve the diverse communities at their doorstep.

These venues help companies like Phizzical and emerging artists with small scale production and touring. Supporting venues will enable benefits to be passed to producing companies and artists to create films/and/or live stream their productions. This way, we can all extend reach out into those communities who will be locked in for much longer particularly in the vulnerable BAME communities.

Reopening theatre with socially distant seating is not financially viable. Small arts centres may be able to open up earlier than the bigger theatres, but they will still need subsidy until they can build audiences confidence. They will struggle to fund some of the physical adjustments they need to make to make actors safe in changing rooms/green rooms etc. The survival of UK's vibrant arts and creative sector needs investment until social distancing is no longer required.