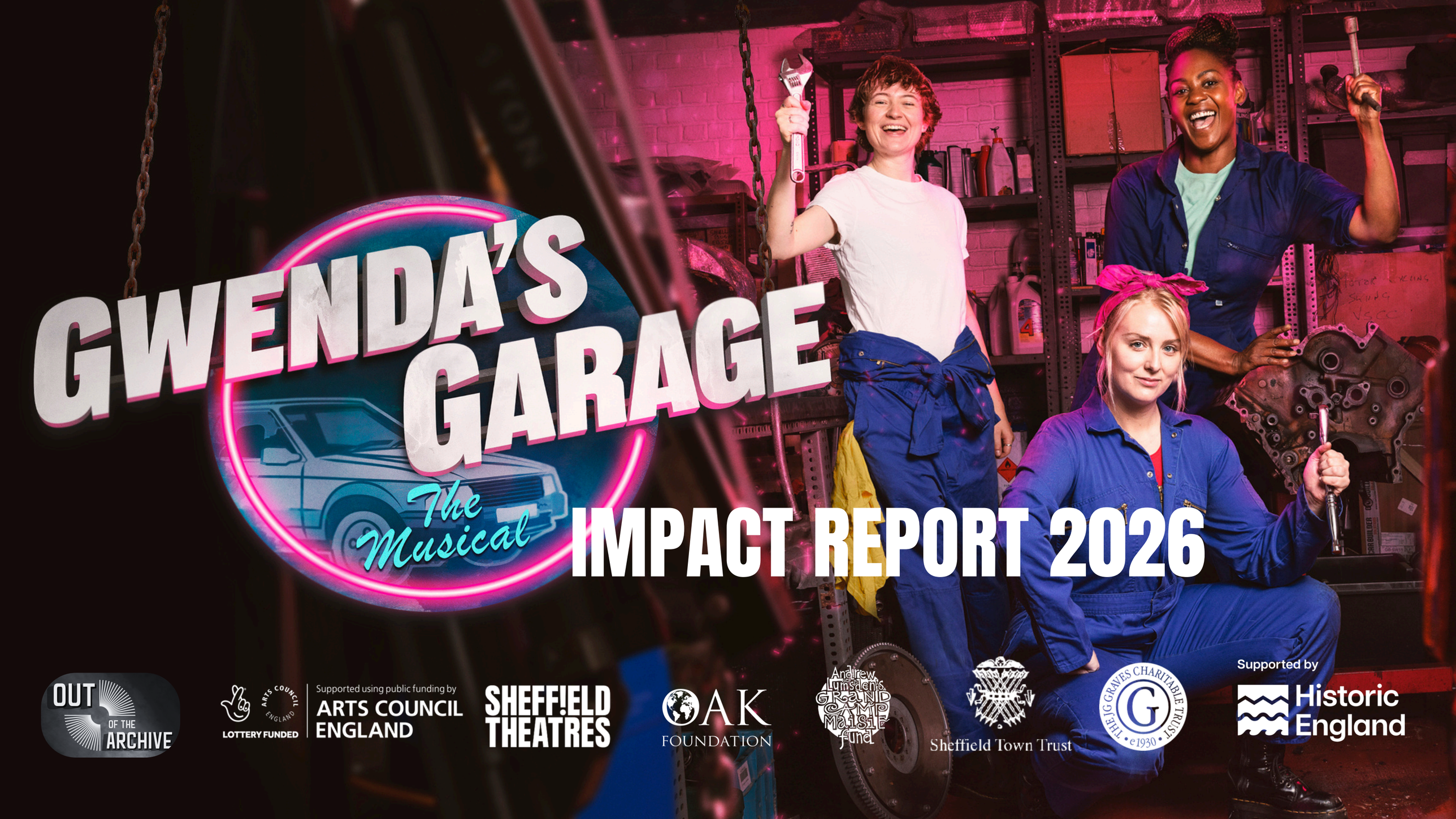


IMPACT REPORT 2026

OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

SHEFFIELD THEATRES

OAK FOUNDATION

Andrew Lumsden's GRAND CAMP MAISIE fund

Sheffield Town Trust

THE J.G. GRAVES CHARITABLE TRUST • e1930 •

Supported by Historic England

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Produced by Out of the Archive, Directed by Jelena Budimir, Script by Nicky Hallett, Music by Val Regan, Lyrics by Val Regan in collaboration with Nicky Hallett

GWENDA'S GARAGE is an exuberant call to arms, filled with **humour**, **heart** and **hope**, celebrating the **power of collective action**.

Gwenda's – a real car repair workshop in 1980s Sheffield – was always about more than cars, all about fixing the system.

Created by an **all-lesbian team**, our musical is rooted in Sheffield yet tells a national story of activism in a period of despair. ***GWENDA'S GARAGE*** is inspired by stories of those associated with the garage, fictionalised to show how women made space for themselves and others in a hostile political world.

The story follows mechanics Bev, Carol and Terry, their apprentice Dipstick, and ally Feona, as they fight to live free from prejudice, creating space for women and LGBTQ+ rights.

In 2025, as civil liberties continue to be challenged across the world, this rousing new musical couldn't be on stage at a more urgent moment.

GWENDA'S GARAGE was presented at Sheffield Theatres and Southwark Playhouse alongside a targeted outreach programme designed to engage young people and underrepresented communities.

The project combined a new musical production with workshops, schools engagement, and participatory learning, focusing on themes of activism, working-class history, LGBTQIA+ identity, and collective action.

SHEFFIELD THEATRES
OUT OF THE ARCHIVE
LOTTERY FUNDED
Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND





PROJECT AIMS

ENGAGE NEW AUDIENCES

Primary audience were those interested in "gender, activism and politics" followed by "musicals and theatre audience". Audiences were more interested in the story than just theatre itself.

SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

We engaged with 395 young people across Sheffield and London. 93% of participants felt fully or somewhat that their voice or ideas mattered.

INCREASED ACCESS FOR UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES

We delivered 4 sold-out accessible performances including captioned, BSL and audio described.
91% of audiences felt that the show represented underrepresented communities.

CELEBRATE LOCAL & LGBTQIA+ HERITAGE

88% of audiences said that the show sparked conversations about activism, community or identity.

PRESS REVIEWS

'DRIVES AUDIENCES TO **EXCITEMENT** WITH INFECTIOUS MUSICAL NUMBERS'

JACKSTAGE

'A **SPIRITED CELEBRATION** OF WOMEN WHO DARED TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO'

ALL THAT DAZZLES

'A SUPREMELY CONFIDENT, **BRILLIANTLY EXECUTED** SHOW, THAT GRABS YOU FROM THE FIRST BEAT AND NEVER LETS GO'

THE PEG REVIEW

'AN ENERGETIC CAST **FULL OF HEART** AND PURPOSE'

NORTH WEST END

'AN **INFECTIOUS ATMOSPHERE** OF COLLECTIVE FEMINIST AND QUEER PROTEST'

GUARDIAN

'THE MUST-SEE **LESBIAN MUSICAL OF THE YEAR**'

DIVA MAGAZINE

'JOYFUL **PUNCH-IN-THE-AIR** DEFIANCE OF BIGOTRY'

TIME OUT

'**LOVINGLY RESTORING** THESE WOMEN'S VALUABLE STORY

THE STAGE

'A **HUMOROUS, BIG-HEARTED** AND **INSPIRING** SHOW'

BRITISH THEATRE GUIDE



AUDIENCE RESPONSE

We asked our audiences to fill in a feedback form and we found that:

OVERALL EXPERIENCE

★★★★★ 79%

★★★★☆ 19%

★★★☆☆ 2%

WHAT STOOD OUT MOST

- Themes (feminism, activism, queer history) – 90%
- Music and songs – 85%
- Performances – 81%
- Community / historical relevance – 74%
- Story and script – 73%

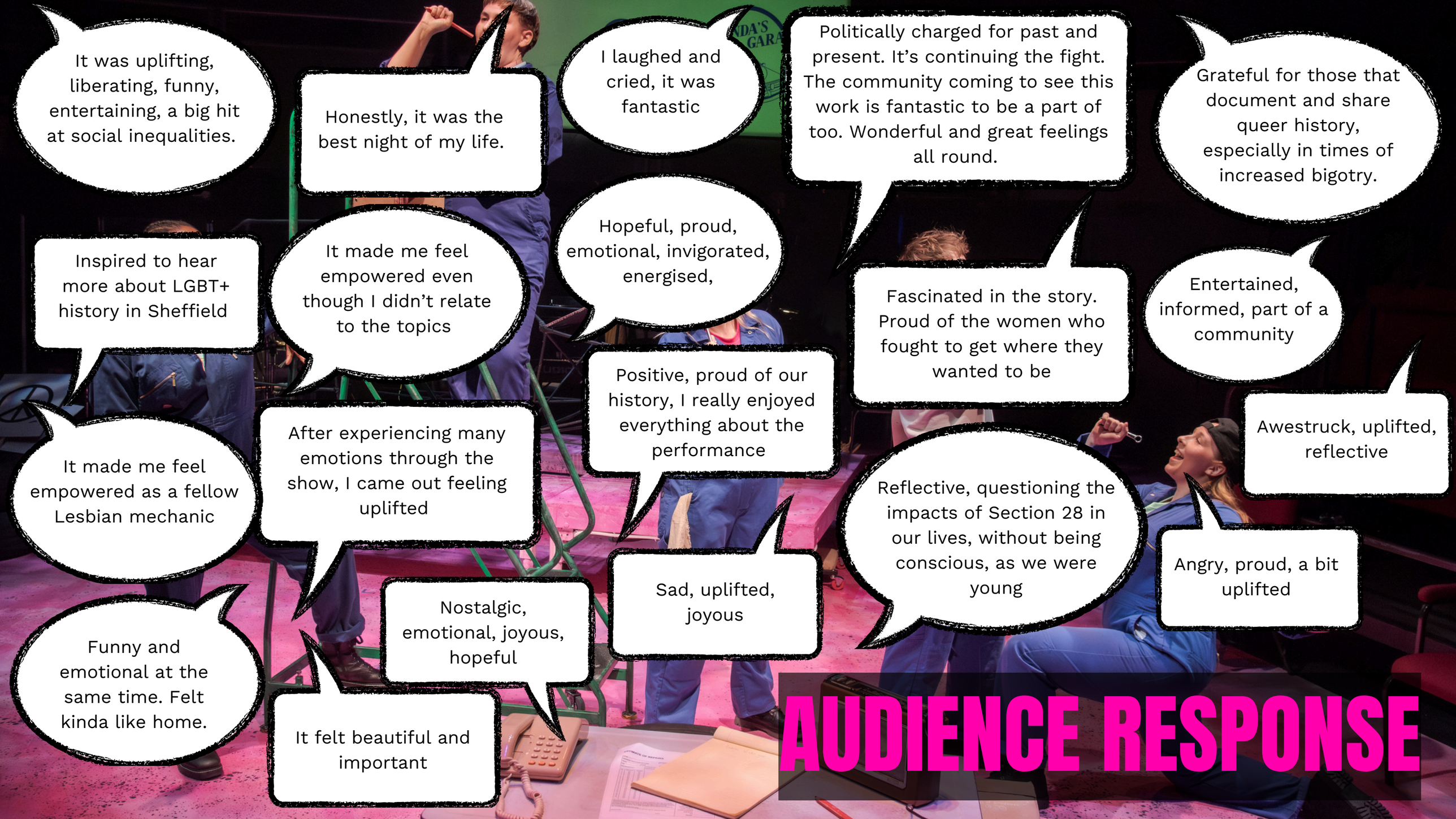
WHAT DID AUDIENCE LEARN ABOUT MOST

- Sheffield history
- Section 28
- Lesbian and feminist activism
- Hidden or forgotten stories

REPRESENTATION & RELEVANCE

- 91% said the show reflected underrepresented communities
- 88% said the show sparked conversations about activism, identity and community
- 95% wanted to see more theatre exploring LGBTQIA+ and working-class stories
- 96% would recommend the show




It was uplifting, liberating, funny, entertaining, a big hit at social inequalities.
Honestly, it was the best night of my life.
I laughed and cried, it was fantastic
Politically charged for past and present. It's continuing the fight. The community coming to see this work is fantastic to be a part of too. Wonderful and great feelings all round.
Grateful for those that document and share queer history, especially in times of increased bigotry.
Inspired to hear more about LGBT+ history in Sheffield
It made me feel empowered even though I didn't relate to the topics
Hopeful, proud, emotional, invigorated, energised,
Fascinated in the story. Proud of the women who fought to get where they wanted to be
Entertained, informed, part of a community
It made me feel empowered as a fellow Lesbian mechanic
After experiencing many emotions through the show, I came out feeling uplifted
Positive, proud of our history, I really enjoyed everything about the performance
Awestruck, uplifted, reflective
Reflective, questioning the impacts of Section 28 in our lives, without being conscious, as we were young
Angry, proud, a bit uplifted
Sad, uplifted, joyous
Nostalgic, emotional, joyous, hopeful
Funny and emotional at the same time. Felt kinda like home.
It felt beautiful and important
AUDIENCE RESPONSE

AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS



AUDIENCE NUMBERS

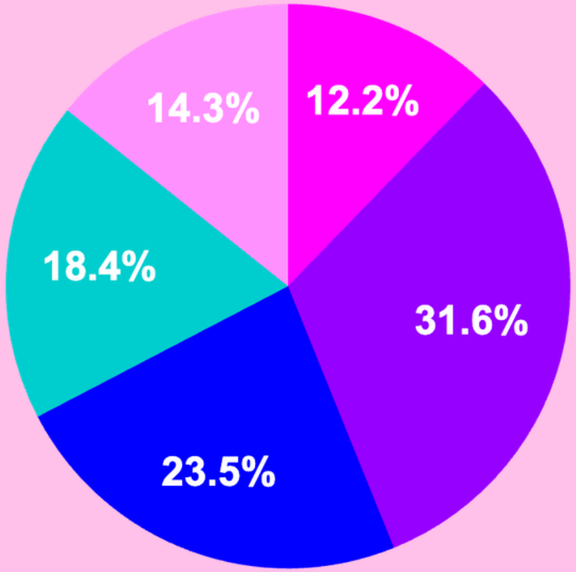
Sheffield: 2401, 87%

London: 4599, 79%

Total: 7000, 81%

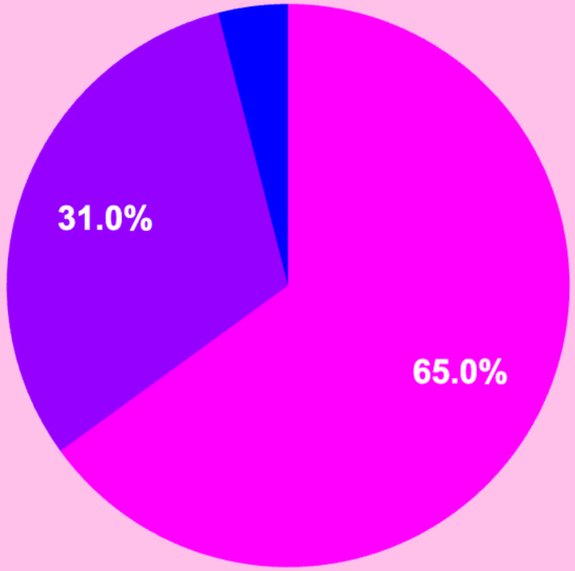
*The below figures are based on the 135 responses from our feedback form

AGE



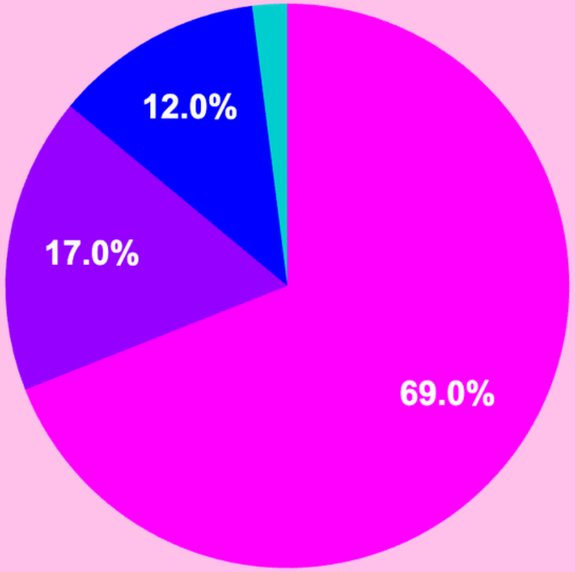
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-49
- 50-64
- 65+

LGBTQIA+



- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

GENDER IDENTITY

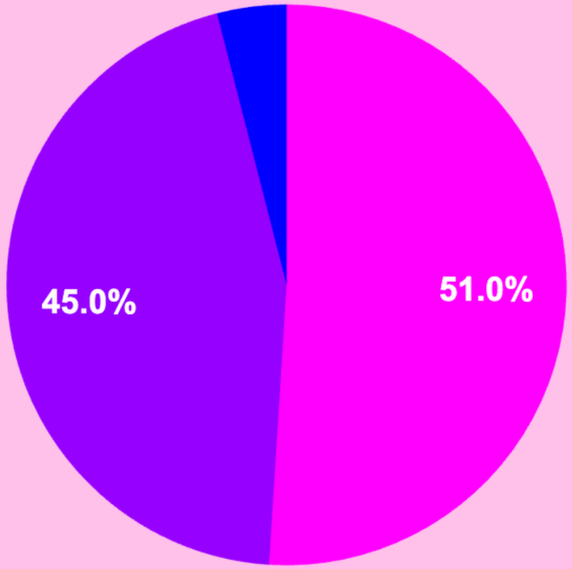


- Woman
- Non-Binary
- Man
- Prefer not to say



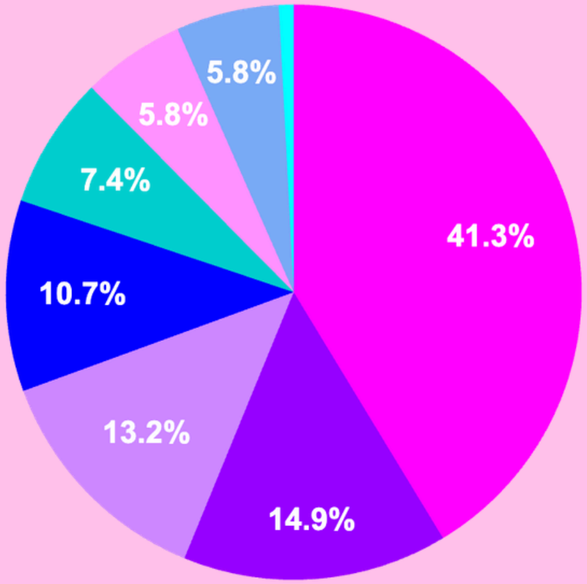
*The below figures are based on the 135 responses from our feedback form

DISABILITY



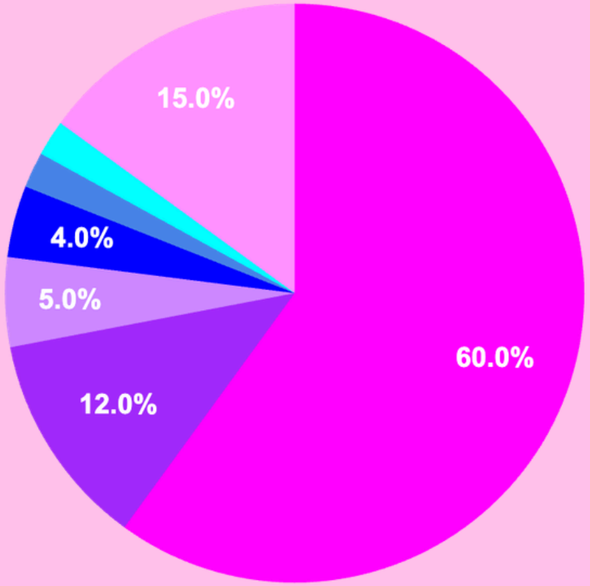
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND



- Modern professional
- Senior manager / professional
- Technical / craft worker
- Routine / manual worker
- Small business owner
- Clerical / administrative
- Don't know / Prefer not to say
- Long-term unemployed

ETHNICITY



- White
- Mixed
- Jewish
- Asian
- Romani / Traveller
- Other
- Prefer not to say

OUTREACH PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Alongside the production, we delivered an outreach programme which included:

- Schools workshops
- Creative writing sessions
- Music and songwriting workshops
- Q&A sessions with artists
- Matinee performances
- Post-show discussions

The workshops explored:

- Activism and protest
- LGBTQIA+ history
- Working-class stories
- Collective action
- Creative expression

These activities were designed to support curriculum areas including Drama, Music, PSHE, Citizenship and History.



PARTICIPATION

We collaborated with engagement teams at Sheffield Theatres and Southwark Playhouse and worked with 11 schools and colleges across Sheffield and London.

Total participants: 395 young people

- Sheffield: 162
- London: 233

Demographic reach:

- Free School Meals: 33%
- English as Additional Language: 17%
- Global Majority: 36%
- Disabled participants: 10%



OUTREACH IMPACT

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Participants reported feeling:

- Inspired – 29%
- Energised – 25%
- Confident – 16%

PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

- **91.3%** of participants felt fully or mostly able to take part and **share their ideas**.
- **93.0%** of participants felt fully or somewhat that **their voice or ideas mattered**.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SHOW

- **96%** of young people reported **positive emotional** responses to the show
- Nearly one third highlighted specific songs or moments
- Almost **90%** used explicitly **positive** language to describe the **show**
- Key messages around activism, women's history and collective action were retained

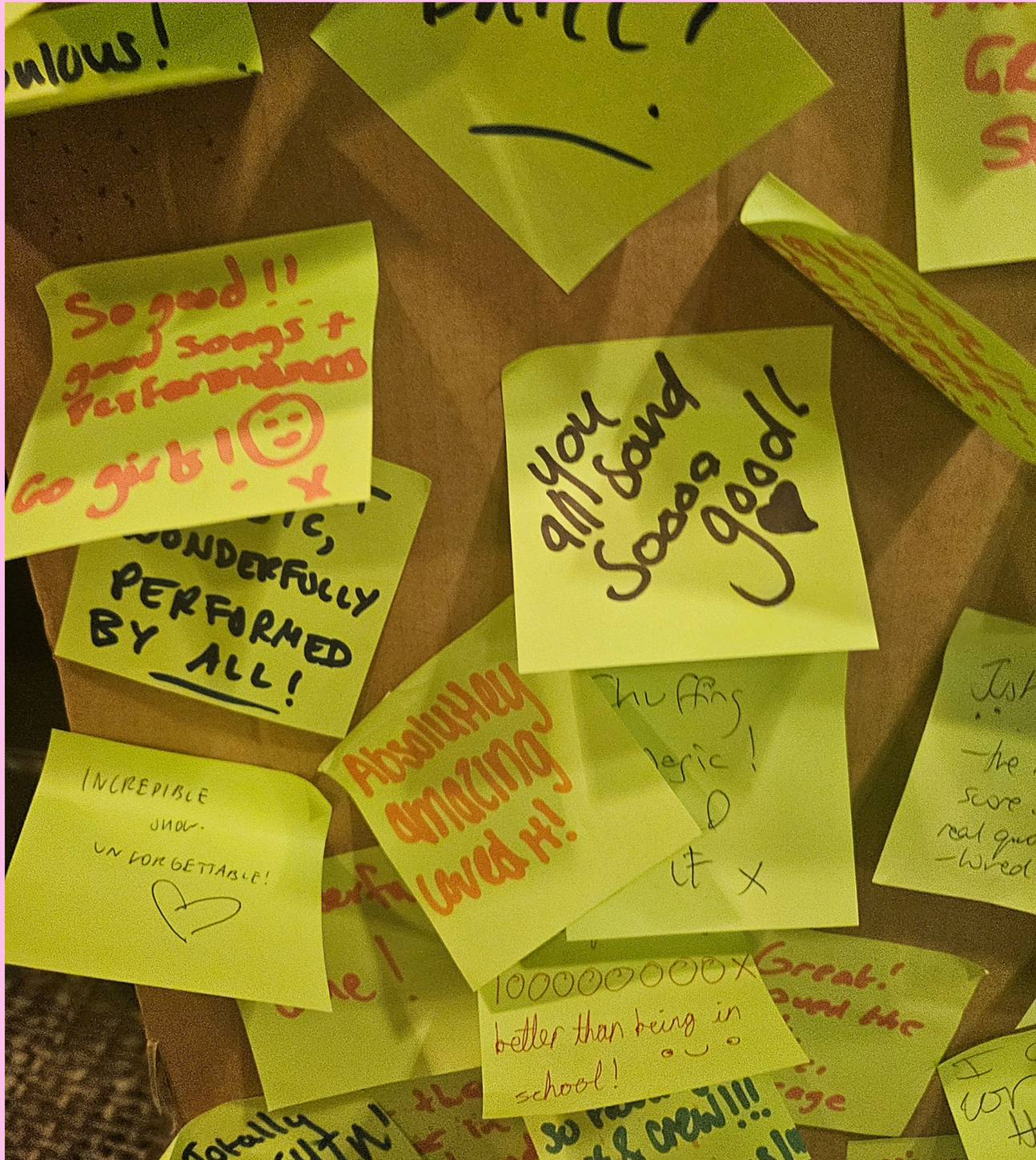


OVERALL IMPACT

The project successfully:

- Reached diverse and underrepresented communities
- Delivered high-quality artistic work
- Supported creative development
- Sparked conversations about activism and identity
- Built new audiences for musical theatre

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from audiences and participants demonstrates strong artistic, social and educational impact.



THANKS

We are greatly indebted to all the people and organisations who have supported us to make *Gwenda's Garage*.

Thanks to Emma Gale; Eleanor Hill; Sean Curran, Alfie Stroud and colleagues, Historic England; Amy Marsh, Jessica Shipton and colleagues, Sheffield Museums; Sheffield Theatres; Southwark Playhouse; Chickenshed Theatre; Arts Council England; JG Graves Charitable Trust; Sheffield Town Trust; Grand Camp Maisie Fund; the Oak Foundation; and Sheffield Grammar School Exhibition Foundation.

Historic England's Everyday Heritage Grants: Celebrating Working Class Histories funded development of the script in hand performance of Gwenda's Garage

Special thanks to those who entrusted us with their remarkable stories: Mary Allebone, Ange Andrassy, Jill Angood, Tina Ball, Angela Galvin, Em Lawless, Angie Piesold, Seni Seneviratne, Martine Standish, Maureen Storey, Sue Wakefield, Caroline Webb, Roz Wollen and many others.

Additional thanks to Sylvia Ashton, Kythe Beaumont, Sue Bottomley, Jane Coker, Sarah Daniels, Sarah Finlay, Alexandra Graves, Judy Hockley, Graeme Hunt, Jacqui Leigh, Linda Pressly, Andrea Small, Rosie Valerio, Sally Weston; and Dom Bilkey, Huw Llewellyn and Dave Tuff from the National Theatre.

We honour the memory of Ros Wall (who died in 2010), Annette Williams (who died in 2017), Jill Angood (who died in 2023), and Hilary Wilson (who died in 2014, who inspired creative friendships).

We mark the inspiration of the garage's pioneering namesake, Gwenda Stewart, who died in 1990, the same year that Gwenda's Garage was sold by its original founders.

