



# The Vital Spark Symposium

13 and 14 March 2024  
Attenborough Arts Centre

**Baboró**  
International Arts  
Festival for Children



Vital Spark is led by The Spark Arts for Children, in association with Baboró International Arts Festival for Children and in partnership with Inspire: Culture, Learning, Libraries, Attenborough Arts Centre & Lincoln Arts Centre.



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ENGLAND**

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## Welcome to The Vital Spark Symposium!



**Christopher Gorry**  
Artistic Director, The Spark Arts for Children



Welcome to the Vital Spark Symposium. The Spark has invested considerable resource over the last 5 years in the Vital Spark movement thanks to Arts Council England investment as a National Portfolio Organisation. We continue to provide a nationally significant programme that addresses the lack of diversity in the Performance for Young Audiences (PYA) sector.

We've made great strides, but there is so much more to do... and with your help here, over these two days we'll all make the sector stronger.

You only have to look at the press, talk to that friend who's funding bid was unsuccessful or chat to a colleague over a breaktime cuppa to recognise that the landscape for artists and organisations continues to grow more challenging. Here at The Spark we are committed to making the PYA sector more relevant and inclusive - and Vital Spark is at the heart of that nationally and internationally.

We're all operating in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) landscape. Whether that's increased costs, local authority cuts or the competition for funds from trusts and foundations. The impact is real for organisations big or small and artists emerging and established. I'd pose that its affecting everyone at a scale comparable to their size. Some might say the pressures are the same - just with a few more or less zeros on the balance sheet.

But of course, the impact of that balance sheet is affecting freelance artists the most. When it's hand to mouth - quite literally, how do you sustain your practise when you need to pay the bills? And what are organisations doing to sustain artists? Not just the transactional paying of invoices, but relationally driving the artistic ecosystem, through investing in care, development and professional growth.

We're all here because we care. We care about performance for young audiences. We care about artists. We care about the future of our sector as a whole and the part Performance for Young Audience plays in the wider theatre ecology.

But in a climate where caring costs more, and the money feels less and less- how can we come together to address the challenges and find a way forward to benefit the people that need the work most - children. After all those audiences of TODAY and NOW are who we are serving.

So, we're inviting you to take some time, be brave, take courage, pass that courage on to others you meet here and find new allies on your journey. And with that, through collective commitment to action, we can ride the current storm and find a way of continuing to make the Performance for Young Audiences sector as relevant and inclusive as it should be.

# Schedule

## Wednesday 13th March

### 10.30am Arrivals

#### Drop a Truth Bomb!

On arrival, if you wish, complete a truth bomb slip and pop it in the Truth Bomb Box. Consider a provocation to drive conversation over the next two days:

- Do you have a statement you want to make, to provoke a conversation around making our sector more relevant and inclusive?
- Is there a question you'd love to ask to the room, to drive collective change?
- Maybe you know a commitment to action for addressing the lack of diversity in the performance for Young Audiences Sector?

We just ask that truth bombs are anonymous, and do not name individuals or organisations as they will be used as part of the reflective workshop on day 1. We're all for the debate - but if individuals or organisations aren't here to tell their side of the story - we'd be removing their right to reply.

### 11.00am – 12.00pm – Main Hall

#### Panel Discussion: Where we are at?

Hear from an industry panel working for a variety of organisations as they share the current reality of their experience and how that impacts the inclusivity and relevance of the Performance for Young Audience sector.

### 12.15pm – 1.45pm – Carousel

Red Badge: Studio 1

#### Vital Spark Ideas Fund sharing

Discover the innovative projects of three Vital Spark artists and learn how organisations can support these projects and contribute to their realisation.

Blue Badge: Main Hall

#### Reflective workshop: From shared truths, comes collective courage

A facilitated reflective session. Share your truths, connect with peers, and explore how collective action can address challenges and opportunities in the PYA sector.

### 1.45pm – 2.45pm – Lunch provided

Please eat your food in the main hall rather than the cafe

### 2.45pm – 3.45pm – Carousel

Red Badge: Main Hall

#### Reflective workshop: From shared truths, comes collective courage

Blue Badge: Studio 1

#### Vital Spark Ideas Fund sharing

**4.00pm – 4.45pm – Main Hall**

### **Q&A with Vital Spark Ideas Fund Artists**

**4.45pm – 5.15pm – Main Hall**

### **Digging Deep: Trust and Care**

Join us for this insight into how trust and care is held as part of the Vital Spark ideas fund process with recipient Dave 'Stickman' Higgins.

**5.15pm – 6.15pm – Main Hall**

### **Digging Deep: Truth and Courage**

Move from talk to action. Join us in co-creating the Vital Spark collective commitment to action, leveraging our shared truths and collective courage.

**7.30pm – 9.30pm – The Distillery, City Centre**

### **The Social**

Join us from 7.30pm at The Distillery, 27 Market Street, Leicester, LE1 6DP for an evening of informal social networking. Relax and Reflect on the day with colleagues, new friends and future allies! Please note that drinks are not provided, the kitchen is open for orders until 8.30pm.

## **Thursday 13th March**

**10.00am – 11.00pm – Main Hall**

### **Lets Talk Money: Relational Investment in Artists through Vital Spark**

Case studies on the impact of Lincoln Arts Centre and Baboró International Arts Festival for Children becoming Vital Spark partners.

**11.15am – 1.00pm**

### **The Debate: Comfortable Quality Vs Courageous Ambition**

A lively debate on the merits of Comfortable Quality versus Courageous Ambition and how each contributes to diversifying the PYA sector.

**1.00pm – 2.00pm – Lunch provided**

Please eat in the main hall rather than the cafe

**2.00pm – 3.45pm – Main Hall**

### **Meet the Vital Spark Relationship Artists 2024**

Our annual event to meet and engage with the Vital Spark relationship artists. This year the artists will frame their introduction around what they needed to see more of when they were six years old and how that drives their creative practice as adults.

**4.00pm – 4.30pm – Main Hall**

### **The Way Forward...**

A chance to reflect and collectively take action for the way forward.

## Meet the Contributors



**Ben Anderson**  
(Creative & Executive Director of Lincoln Arts Centre)



**Rachel Baltz**  
(Artist & Programme Coordinator of Baboró International Arts Festival for Children)



**Daryl Beeton**  
(Artistic Director, Daryl and Co, Associate Vital Spark Company)



**Adam Carver** a.k.a Fatt Butcher  
(Founder and Director of Fatt Projects)



**Titilola Dawudu**  
(Writer/Programmer/Producer and Associate Dramaturg at The Bush Theatre)



**Jo Gordon**  
(Chief Executive of Royal & Derngate, Northampton)



**Christopher Gorry**  
(Artistic Director, The Spark Arts for Children and Trustee, Zest Theatre)



**Trina Haldar**  
(Founder and Artistic Director of Mashi Theatre)



**Abid Hussain**  
(Director, Diversity, Arts Council England)



**Tara Lopez**  
(Director of Participation at Nottingham Playhouse)



**Aislinn Ó hEocha**  
(Executive Artistic Director of Baboró International Arts Festival for Children)



**Tony Reekie**  
(Executive Director of Catherine Wheels Theatre Company)



**Keisha Thompson**  
(Artistic Director/CEO, Contact)



## Ideas Fund Artists



Tanya Akrofi



Justyna Cwojdzńska



Dave 'Stickman' Higgins

## Relationship Programme Artists



Debora Adachi



Tanya Akrofi



Justyna Cwojdzńska



Alexandra Gogan



Sarah 'Rain' Kolawole



HK Ní Shioradáin



Tandeka Williams

# Delegates

Aislinn O'hEocha Baboró International Arts Festival for Children	Debora Naomi Adachi Independent Artist	Kate Hall Jumped Up Theatre	Tatiana Kidder The Spark Arts for Children
Alexandra Gogan Independent Artist	Elizabeth O'Neill Z Arts	Keisha Thompson Contact Theatre	Titi Dawudu Independent Artist/Producer
Alison Garratt Oily Cart Theatre Company	Fay Lamb Citedel Arts	Lauren Russell Independent Artist	Tom Newton The Spark Arts for Children
Andrew Fletcher Attenborough Arts Centre	Gillian McNamara Independent Artist	Liz Clark Turned on It's Head	Tony Reekie Catherine Wheels Theatre Company
Ben Anderson Lincoln Arts Centre	Helen Goodbarton Independent Artist	Louise Gilmour-Wills Catherine Wheels Theatre Company	Zita Epenge Hep Paleis
Bridie Gane Catherine Wheels Theatre Company	HK Ní Shioradáin Independent Artist	Pasha Kincaid Independent Artist	
Carolyn Gallagher Inspire Culture Learning Libraries	Isah-Levi Roach Z Arts	Rachel Baltz Baboró International Arts Festival for Children	
Christopher Gorry The Spark Arts for Children	James Lawrence The Spark Arts for Children	Rhianna Mayhew Junction Arts	
Clare Sabri Inspire Culture Learning Libraries	James Preston Lyra	Samantha Lane Little Angel Theatre	
Daniel Naddafy Playground	Jemma Burton Junction Arts	Sarah Kolawole Independent Artist	
Daryl Beeton Daryl & Co	John Kirby Attenborough Arts Centre	Tandeka Williams Independent Artist	
Dave Higgins Independent Artist	Justyna Cwojdzinska Independent Artist	Tanya Akrofi Independent Artist	