

Notes to Support Funding Application
Modestly Proposed to the Woolwich Tourist Board

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Dear Sirs,

Please see below outline for a promenade performance, to be conducted over five afternoons/early evenings, in and around Woolwich Town Centre in the London Borough of Greenwich during summer 2011, leading to a fortnight of events during the 2012 Olympics, Woolwich being perfectly sited to welcome visitors from Stratford.

We propose that this piece will more than adequately cater for the many tourists (primarily but not exclusively from North America and Western Europe) who regularly flock to visit Woolwich's famous sites over the summer months, and will also encourage them to visit the lesser known attractions – eg, Eltham Palace, Greenwich Park, the Maritime Museum, Observatory etc. We further predict that even locations north of the river (Canary Wharf, the Isle of Dogs) could benefit from some of the spill-over. It seems only fair that a centre of such world-renown as Woolwich should make more of a conscious effort to share some of its gains with the less-lauded areas of the Borough, and we look forward to making this possible through our work.

We await your response with interest,

Two Sisters Arts

The Characters

Sister 1 : is a nurse. She has just finished night shift at the Dagenham Ford factory. She is the mother of four adult children with three grandchildren. One of these adult children died fourteen years ago – orphan and widow/er are useful terms, there is no word in English for the parent of a dead child. She has had three hours sleep and prepares for the journey to Woolwich. Transport for London has predicted it will take her an hour.

(For promenade purposes, we envisage a bus journey from Essex into SE18, the reverse of the journey undertaken by so many working class families when they 'migrated' to Essex in the 60's and 70's.)

Sister 2 : is a maker. Books, cakes, theatre, gardens. She lives in Lambeth. TFL predicts her journey – two overland trains via London Bridge – will also take an hour. *(We imagine the possibility, with TFL's assistance, of collecting groups of audiences at both Denmark Hill and London Bridge. We are also in talks with the Thames Clipper service about the potential of an integrated journey downriver from Westminster or Waterloo Piers, to Greenwich. Again, this would bring our promenaders past the lesser known elements of Greenwich – Cutty Sark, Observatory, the Painted Hall – on their way to the more popular tourist destination of Woolwich Market.)*

The Journey

Once on their trains the Sisters (and their collected audience members) begin texting each other in an on-the-move multi-media flash event. Starting at two different destinations in a journey forward to their past.

The Show

On arrival in Woolwich, the Sisters perform the classic ‘Which Exit Are You At?’ sketch, so beloved of our audiences who have seen us work up the same routine very successfully at Oxford Circus and Waterloo Stations, and also across all levels of the Barbican and the National Theatre.

(If time and funding allow there is a possibility this could be extended to include a Woolwich Arsenal/Arsenal-Islington stations comedy mix-up, similar to the company’s highly successful 2008 show : “Oh, I Thought You Meant The Other Lyric – Lyric Hammersmith/Lyric Shaftesbury Avenue”)

Having met and united their Essex and south London audiences, the Sisters will then begin the actual **Woolwich Promenade**. Based on the original journeys taken by those working ‘up town’ in the 1960s, the Sisters will walk from the station to the Ogilby Street flats and back again, taking in sites of particular interest in the journey. These include (but will not necessarily be limited to) :

Woolwich Market

Sister 1 tells Sister 2 about the time she became lost in the market. She was only separated from her mother for a moment, but was ‘found’ by a kindly local woman who whisked her away to the Police Station before the mother had a chance to find her child. She was later retrieved from the Police Station by an irate and relieved father. Sister 1 recounts that even at a young age she was aware that the father was torn between the two options of tears of relief or rage at the child for getting lost. She

recalls being surprised not to be hit for getting lost and noting that the father was expressing a conflict of emotions – something she had not previously seen in him.

(For educational purposes, we believe this will provide a very useful opportunity for teacher & school groups to discuss the changing nature of behaviour towards children, not least in the use of corporal punishment. Appropriate material will be included in our Schools Pack.)

Woolwich Library

Sister 1 marvels that not only are the carved wooden banisters of her childhood still intact, but the large wooden doors are still very much part of the main building and must obviously be used when the building is fully locked. The sisters then discuss, in Dr Seuss-like rhyme and rhythm, the first books they read, or were read to, in a library. They share the feeling that the Children's Library always seems warmer and more comfortable than the adults' section, and how – as children – they used to sneak adult books from the shelves and sit reading in quiet corners. They did not do this in the same library, but in libraries almost 12,000 miles apart. The action however, was the same – a librarian reads to a group of small children, that group of small children discover that stories can also happen outside the home, the world is never quite so small again. Eg :

The books that we found in the corners of town

The books that were there on the carved wooden stair

The books and the stories their glorious glories

They took us to places and found us new spaces and they were quite aces

The books we found there.

The books that were tales of drama and whales,

and wails with an I, and Wales with no aitch, or whales with a Y

(there's a Y in your wayles? Like fayre and like tayles, the olden days spayles ...)

Spells.

The library smells. That peculiar, junior, scents of a room for you,

Place for us, space for us, here on the shelves for us.

That's what we found in the library in town.

(Our intention is to include local children's lines in creating an epic poem/story with potential for our promenading audience to join in on the choral line "that's what we found in the library in town".)

Mulgrave Primary School

At the site of Mulgrave Primary School, now the Mulgrave Early Years Centre, both Sisters share with our audience the games of their childhood. On the school playground (permission has been sought), the audience are divided into teams and play games of hopscotch, kick-ball, four square, keepy-uppy, tag, hide and seek, stuck in the mud (aka candlesticks), culminating in an audience-wide game of British Bulldog. After the games the audience will be further entertained, as they catch their breath, by the local children's choir. In case of bad weather (though this is exceedingly rare in Woolwich's excellent micro-climate) the games will be moved inside to include drafts, chess, Monopoly, Twister, Operation, the Game of Life etc.

(The games will give a chance for our audience to enjoy each others' company, create intra-audience relationships, and also to relive their own past glories. We are proud to say we believe this makes us the first UK theatre company to fully comply with the new government-approved Arts & Olympic Council ruling UK-A&OCE106789.5 that it is not appropriate for any member of an audience to remain in a static position for

more than one hour at a time, all shows therefore to have an element of participative physicality. We expect to include children from all parts of the borough in the choir.)

Walk To Ogilby Street

The walk, via John Wilson Street and several smaller streets, into Frances Street to see the shops of note (including the newsagent's where Sisters 1 and 2 went every Saturday morning to collect "the books and papers" – *The Magic Roundabout* comic, *Bunty*, *Tammy*, and *The Woman's Weekly*), will bring in street entertainment in the form of parkour-trained poets performing acrobatic leaps from billboard hoardings, utilising the street-running form to turn the billboard frames and the Arsenal's old brick walls to sites of performance poetry. This technique was first pioneered in 1967 by Sister 1, under the auspices of Big Brother, and has also been noted by Sister 2 in the London Boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth. We believe that by extending the parkour form to include active poetry we can enhance what is otherwise simply a physical activity, adding a literary and emotive element.

(We are also aware of the sadly under-used walls and hoardings in neighbouring Greenwich, most especially those alongside the Observatory and Greenwich Park. We trust that our use here, in Woolwich, will encourage Greenwich residents to see the multi-function possibilities of their own walls, thereby giving them hope that their own area might one day achieve some of the international recognition, usually only given to Woolwich and, on occasion, Eltham South.

At The Flat

Stopping at the council block, childhood home of Two Sisters Arts (also of Big Brother, and the original Four Older Sisters Company), Sister 1 and Sister 2 will lead

the audience in a Climb Up the Stairs, a chance to enjoy the startling Original Blue of the wall tiles. On the first landing we will offer Tales From The Shute – a series of inter-connected pieces about rubbish recycling, drawing on stories from all twelve families living in the block. On the top floor we will engage in another participatory programme, this time encouraging the oldest members of the audience to climb on to a recreation of Sister 2's original 1967 tricycle, and – as Sister 2 did in the 1960s – race against themselves in timed trials the length of the balcony that connects all three top floor flats.

(We perceive this intergenerational work to be one of the highlights of the season.)

Sisters 1 and 2 will also recreate the famous “Up the Slope” image from 1967 – attached.



We will then recreate, in Flat 8, two parties that occurred in 1967. The first is the infamous Parents' Night Out Party. Sisters 1 and 2 having been left in the care of Big Brother and the Four Older Sisters Company, there was a large and diverse 'youth' party, mostly young people aged between 15 and 21, with music from a number of popular bands of the time, several friends of friends, and various trips with little girls (in nighties, dressing gowns and slippers) to the off-license. Whereas in the original, this was halted at an early time and involved numerous young men climbing three floors from the balcony down to the ground, then running off into the night accompanied by the shouted threats of Angry Father and Worried Mother, we propose

that Party 1 will segue smoothly into Party 2 – The Farewell Party, in which Family of Four (comprised of Sisters 1 & 2 and The Parents) prepare to leave for New Zealand. Music for this will be a medley of Mrs Mills’ Party Favourites and Irish Pub Songs on a looped track, while we will offer our audience the classic south London party delicacies of sausage rolls, and sliced egg and bacon pie.

(The first of these parties will use members of the local Youth Theatre, playing an earlier generation version of themselves, thereby again fulfilling the requirements of our intergenerational funding application. The second will provide ample opportunities for school groups to engage in a sociological study of the white working class in late 1960’s Britain and their attitudes to their own emigration, while Geography students will no doubt benefit from studying the route of the Family of Four’s subsequent journey on the Shaw Saville Southern Cross – taking in Trinidad and Tobago, the Panama Canal and several of the Polynesian Islands.)

Lead-up to the Finale

This section of the promenade will feature a firework display on Woolwich Common, using – as is appropriate for the location – live ammunition. It will be supervised by those of the MoD currently stationed there, and will use the toddlers from the Woolwich Common Nursery School to create a tableau displaying Woolwich’s history from its Iron Age beginnings, through the founding of the dockyard, the establishment of the Military Academy, the incorporation with London, and finally the opening of the UK’s first branch of McDonald’s in the town centre. The walk back downhill will take in various art deco delights and will allow the recreation of another landmark moment, that of Sister 1’s regular flight from the back of an old route-master at the roundabout between the two deco cinemas. This fare-dodging

tactic was well known in the late 1960's and will be recreated here by a team of acrobats on board an original Routemaster bus, brought out of retirement for this purpose.

The Finale

The audience and all performers will by now have re-grouped outside Woolwich Town Hall, the doors will then open and, as if they are rising from the black and white tiled floor, an assemblage of market stall holders, all dressed in black and white, will erupt from the Town Hall. They will lead the audience through to the market where, with a medley of traditional British songs, and very much in the style of Stanley Holloway in *My Fair Lady*, they will begin a simple routine of dances designed to allow the public to join in. When the audience are sufficiently engaged, the music and the routine will then change to the now-theatrically-obligatory (but nonetheless enjoyable for that) Bollywood form. The black and white attire of the market holders will turn inside out to reveal a multitude of colours.

We expect that by now, with public and performers engaged together, there will be upwards of 500+ people, dancing, singing and enjoying learning the simple routines together in a dance route that takes in Woolwich Market and the waterfront.

At the waterfront, the Sisters will again divide the group into two : Sister 1 will lead the first group underneath the river via the Woolwich Foot Tunnel, while Sister 2 takes the second group over the river on the Woolwich Car Ferry.

When all audience and performers have assembled on the north side of the Thames, the Thames Barrier will be raised and lowered, synchronised in time with the pulsing Bollywood beat.

Then, from the southern shore, the assembled audience will see the Green Man rise above Oxleas Wood, walking downhill to the township of Woolwich. Sited comfortably beside the Woolwich Leisure Centre, the Green Man will then beckon the people back from the less-popular north to the glorious south.

(Operated by cranes, and held together by a simple yet effective pulley system, the Green Man is actually made of 504 metre-long canoes which, when laid end-to-end, span the width of the Thames at this point.)

The Green Man comes to the edge of the water, his powerful and enticing voice now clear above the music, and lays himself down across the water, so that our audience and performers can walk back across the Thames, on a bridge made of his linked, upturned canoes.

When all have crossed safely, the Green Man will reassemble for a moment before sinking beneath the river.

(All the canoes are attached to miniature buoys and will be retrievable the following morning.)

One last chorus as one remaining rocket lights the sky, then there is a final glimpse of the Green Man beneath the water, and the show is over.

Sisters 1 and 2 will lead the audience back to the centre where they will enjoy a pie and mash supper (vegetarian options available) before boarding their respective forms of transport and heading home.

Predicted outcomes :

- increased interest in the areas surrounding the thriving centre of Woolwich, such as Greenwich, Blackheath, Shooters Hill – areas that usually do not

benefit from Woolwich's high recognition factor among tourists/theatre-goers which will also enjoy the knock-on effect of those audience members who choose to stay overnight and look around the next day.

- through showing the better-known history of Woolwich it is envisioned that audiences will become more interested in the history of the whole area, and may even be persuaded to visit the Greenwich Museums, Eltham Palace etc

Final statement

We, of Two Sisters Arts are committed to sharing our vision, and to bringing the prosperity and privilege enjoyed by the lucky denizens of Woolwich to all. As children allowed to roam free across Woolwich Common, through bomb sites, and derelict Arsenal buildings, we know 'our' Woolwich offers a truer insight into the heart of London, than for many of those for whom home is a 1930's semi, an Edwardian mansion block apartment, or modern river-view penthouse. If successful in this grant application we pledge, not only to endeavour to share this good fortune within the wider reaches of the borough itself, but also to reach still further in future. We hope to share Woolwich's privilege with those eking out a living in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the many suffering in Islington, and maybe even to those languishing in the outer reaches of Richmond upon Thames. We aim high, and with your help, Woolwich Tourist Board, we can do it.

Two Sisters Arts, March 2010