

# RESTOKE

ANNUAL REPORT - 2021



Restoke put the people of Stoke-on-Trent at the heart of creative adventures. We make performances and plan events that tackle social issues affecting our communities. We bring people together who may not usually meet, forming bonds of friendship, understanding and solidarity in the city.

# RESTOKE

Co-Artistic Director - Clare Reynolds

Co-Artistic Director - Paul Rogerson

Producer - Sarah Richardson

Restoke, Fenton Town Hall, Baker Street,  
Stoke-on-Trent. ST4 3FA

CIC No: 10791456

[info@restoke.org.uk](mailto:info@restoke.org.uk)  
[www.restoke.org.uk](http://www.restoke.org.uk)



As 2021 slowly unfolded from the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic we were deep into the restoration of the Ballroom at Fenton Town Hall up until our soft opening in August. But plenty of fixing, painting and service installation has continued in between workshops and events since!

Paul project-managed the restoration, which was an intense learning curve that has presented us with so many new skills and knowledge that there's not much he doesn't know about the Ballroom now!

**“It's thrilling to have had the opportunity to restore a space that we know will serve the community for generations to come, a place where many volunteers have left their mark and now a place where we will continue to build each other up.” Paul.**

Meanwhile a commission from the Co-Creating Change network has given us the opportunity to work closely again with Nic Winstanley, creative evaluator extraordinaire, to do a deep dive into our approach to co-creating performance and how we can adapt this to guide our work in the Ballroom.

We are hugely grateful to the people in Fenton, the cafe and volunteers in the Town Hall, and everyone who has welcomed us with open arms. We're so excited to be building on the former civic role of the Town Hall and the community activism which forms its recent history.

We feel like we've found our home at last and can't wait for the adventures coming in 2022!

As our organisation grows we have been lucky to welcome 3 new Trustees to support the governance and future plans for Restoke, and attained organisation development funding from Arts Council England which will help us put down strong roots over the coming year.

We can't ignore the underlying challenges of living and working through a pandemic and the impact on our communities. But we keep looking forward to the role of community arts in the recovery from this disconnection. We know that creative connections form deep bonds, and we will keep pushing to make these a part of people's daily lives in Stoke-on-Trent.

Clare & Paul  
Co-Directors







## RESTORING THE BALLROOM AT FENTON TOWN HALL

At the end of 2020 the Ballroom was still separated into 3 courtrooms, interview rooms and a waiting room. Fully soundproof partitions, doors and a false ceiling had concealed the grand Victorian Ballroom hiding beneath for over 50 years. Working with local contractors the first task was to demolish and remove all these partitions as well as the electrics and heating which serviced all these spaces. But soon we began to reveal the full view of the vaulted ceiling, previously only visible atop a ladder poking through an opening in the ceiling!

Following this we could see the extent of the damage to the Ballroom. Many holes big and small were bricked up, a huge plastering job, woodwork including recreating the original doors and frames, window repairs and uncovering the original timber dance floor!

The next stage was bringing in some elements to improve and make the Ballroom usable again. We added double glazing to the windows, installed lights, new electrics, a hearing loop, a porch to house our technical equipment and we repaired, sanded and finished the floor.

Thanks to additional grants from Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Severn Trent Community Fund we were able to install a lift up to the first floor Ballroom, a first floor accessible toilet and an air source heat pump and new heating system which makes better use of energy.

By August the Ballroom was ready to host activities, whilst work continued behind the scenes and in the gaps between.

£210,000 of funding was raised to restore the Ballroom.



## ONLINE WORKSHOPS

**“Totally loved and appreciated these sessions. The kindness and generosity of free sessions from Restoke resonated at a time which was particularly challenging”**

During the lockdown at the beginning of 2021 our online workshops continued and we added more opportunities to connect. A welcome surprise from these workshops were the amount of new people who joined us from all over the UK (and some people overseas!). We were able to connect with people who knew about our work, but hadn't been able to take part before. We were also surprised by the feedback we received around the sense of community and connection that, despite the challenges of zoom workshops, was still evident.

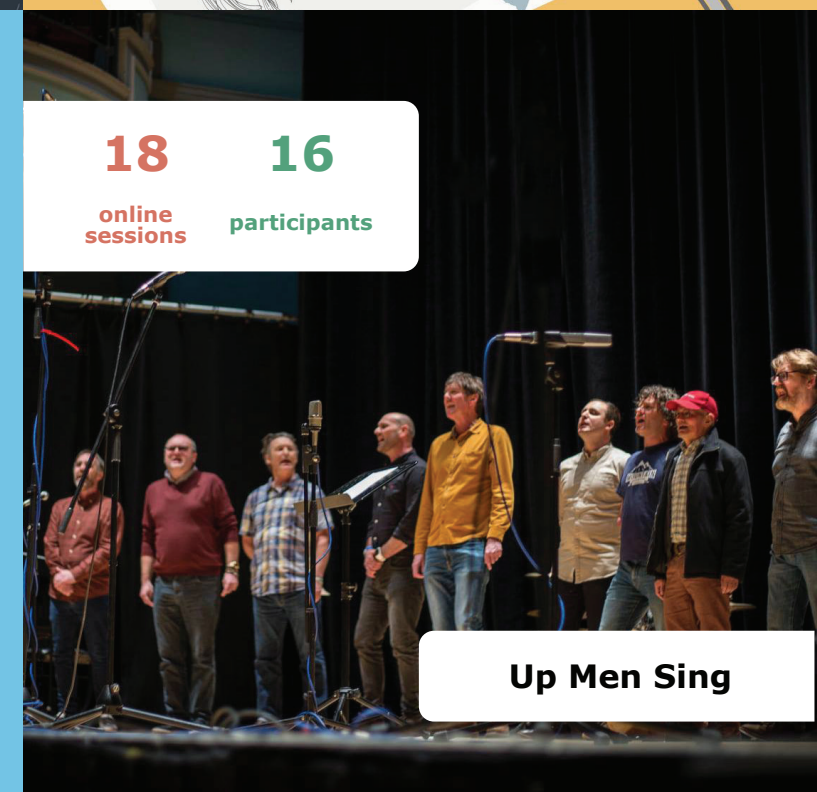
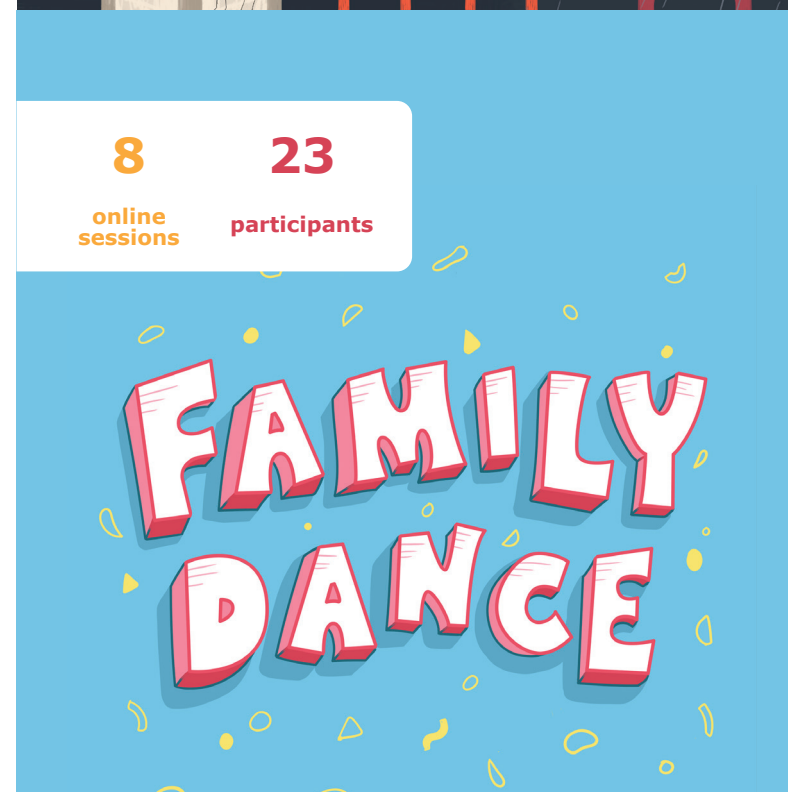
We also appreciated the connection and continuity it offered us throughout lockdown when we were also at home and homeschooling our children!

**“I loved Dancing through the Darkness. It was a ray of light through difficult and challenging times”**

**“To feel part of a ‘community’ when home alone was very important - we had fun too!”**

**“Very enjoyable, it was great to see the men during the Singing sessions and with Jamie I was pushed to a new level with writing... Fantastic”**

**“The Maternal Journal sessions in particular gave us an opportunity to connect and share the ups and downs of lockdown motherhood without pressure to perform or ‘Instagram’ our experiences.”**





# KIDS FENTONIA!

**1** party  
**3** sessions  
**73** participants



## FENTONIA!

FENTONIA! is a series of parties and events with and for Fentonians, happening in the Ballroom at Fenton Town Hall. We started this with KIDS FENTONIA!

Over the bank holiday weekend 28th - 30th August 2021 we brought 15 children from Fenton alongside crafty-party artiste Megan Clarke-Bagnall to plan and host KIDS FENTONIA!

This was the first party in the Ballroom in over 50 years welcoming families from Fenton and across Stoke-on-Trent to celebrate the reopening of this wonderful space!

## KIDS FENTONIA

KIDS FENTONIA also helped us to hear from children in Fenton about their hopes and dreams for the Ballroom. These ideas were gathered and captured by Nic Winstanley and will inform future activities for children in 2022.

Next year we will be planning a FENTONIA party for grown ups in Fenton to plan and deliver their dream party too!





## RESTOKE SMALL FOLK

In order to meet new families and children near our new base and bring new members into our children's company Restoke Small Folk in June, with dance artist Georgina Clare, we started working in schools in Fenton. We worked with years 3 and 4 at Our Lady's, just moments away from our front door in the summer term and invited these children to join us for summer workshops in creative dance and writing at the Ballroom.

In September we ran an after school club at Clarice Cliff school and met more children who have now joined our Saturday morning sessions in the Ballroom.

## ENSEMBLE OF MOTHERS

Despite having to cancel our MOTHER show for 2020 we have continued to build on the conversations and work we started with mothers before and during the pandemic. Opportunities for mothers to come together in non-judgemental spaces to share and create felt important and so we launched the Ensemble of Mothers as a new programme to bring mothers together to move, write, share and sing.

In September we began monthly sessions which are half creative, half social spaces. We were also so happy to work with Rhiannon Faith, dance artist and choreographer, who led 6 weekly sessions sharing her process of creating performances which centralise our emotional lives and experiences.

We finished the year with a journaling session and social with participants from Ensemble of Mothers, Maternal Journal online sessions, Mother to Mother online sessions (led by Gabriella Gay and Kwanzaa collective).

Thanks to funding from This Girl Can (Sport England) we will be continuing to offer dance workshops for mothers throughout 2022.



Restoke Small Folk



Ensemble of Mothers



## OPEN SING

After a huge amount of interest in our singing workshops we decided to offer an open singing session for everyone! The Up Men Sing group had been invited to perform under Luke Gerrams GAIA as part of Appetite and Keele Arts' programme. This felt like a perfect time to open up the choir to new voices.

After 5 open workshops 30 singers performed polyphonic songs from Eastern Europe under the beautiful GAIA installation.

**“So glad to have the opportunity join the two choirs together and blend our voices - it all becomes so much bigger than the sum of its parts - proud of each one of us”**



## ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To support our work at The Ballroom and our growth and development as a community arts organisation we recently received organisational development funding from Arts Council England and Esmée Fairbairn which includes:

**Business Planning | Coaching and Leadership Training  
Wellbeing Frameworks | Website and Marketing**

All of our development and training involves a combination of our core team, Trustees and freelance artists. We are working with some brilliant external facilitators and look forward to continuing this work in 2022 and sharing the impact of this for our organisation!

## OTHER HAPPENINGS IN 2021

### In the Ballroom...

Greenhouse Theatre - produced and performed 'A Night on the Tiles' in September.

Capoeira with Art Brasil - on Thursday evenings the Ballroom hosts capoeira sessions, for beginners and experienced capoeiristas!

Fenton Christmas lights switch on - We have joined Fenton Events Association and opened the Ballroom for market stalls for the recent Christmas lights switch on.

### Workshops/talks/other projects....

Clare has worked with Steelworks College, also based in Fenton, between September and December. They worked on site-specific performances creating a piece in Fenton Town Hall for their showcase in December.

Co-Creating Change Festival - we attended the festival at Battersea Arts Centre and talked about our Growth and Replication commission and work at the Ballroom as part of the programme.



**152**

**total  
number of  
sessions**

**459**

**total  
number of  
participants**

## THANK YOU



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

