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**Meet the female-led Cornish theatre company bucking the trend for women in the arts**

In a landscape which continues to prove challenging for women in the creative arts, there exists a theatre company in Cornwall who are bucking the trend.

Scary Little Girls is a feminist theatre company, started over twenty years ago by creative director Rebecca Mordan. Set up to provide opportunities for women in the creative arts, their mission is to tell underrepresented stories and to give a platform to the voices less heard.

And over the years, they’ve carved out a unique space within the national arts agenda. One of the few feminist theatre companies in the UK, the production company have provided opportunities for hundreds of women to continue their careers in the creative arts.

Scary Little Girls has – in the last 12 months alone – worked with over 100 creative arts freelancers across the UK, with a 98% female freelance workforce.

The touring company has created dozens of paid and voluntary opportunities for women to join them – playing at six festivals including Glastonbury, Green Man and Cornwall-based The Great Estate, creating over twenty new shows touring their home county of Cornwall (as well as touring nationally) and running two Mayven festivals.

Over their 22 years in the arts industry, the theatre company estimates they have provided over 4,000opportunities for women in the creative arts workforce.

Their work ranges from storytelling events across Cornwall to launching their *Mayven* festival – a celebration of the power of women in midlife – in San Francisco.

They also run *the Greenham Women Everywhere* project - bringing a hugely important piece of feminist heritage into public access. This National Lottery funded project which saw the team interview almost 200 of the women who formed the Greenham Common Peace Camp between 1981 and 2000.

The theatre company has developed a range of shows and projects to encourage women to celebrate all stages of life – from their online educational project *Love The Skin You’re In* giving young women the tools to examine their relationship with social media and emotional wellbeing to their latest show *Queenagers*, taking a hilarious and poignant look at menopause.

Rebecca Mordan, creative director for Scary Little Girls, said: “We are operating in an environment which is not weighted towards supporting women. Working in the creative arts is incredibly challenging for women – it is harder to win funding, opportunities are not as widely available, and women are more likely to hold down a second job while trying to forge their careers in the arts. Women will likely be forced to choose between their career and becoming a parent if they’re working in the creative arts.”

She added: “What we try to do at Scary Little Girls is to create supportive communities of women. Whether that’s working for us or coming to our shows as an audience member, women feel good in the company of our work."

Having secured almost £1m in funding across 22 years in the industry, access to Government grants such as the Shared Prosperity Fund is allowing them to continue to create opportunities for women – but their experience is far from the usual trend. Women’s theatre companies received 0.64% of Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation funding between 2015-18.

The Big Freelancer Survey 2023 highlighted a pay gap between the male and female workforce of 37.4% Reports of an industry filled with ageism and sexism are supported by data in this year’s survey revealing that the pay gap widens to 47.7% for freelancers with 21-30 years’ experience in the industry.

Rebecca said: “We exist to provide opportunities for women – our workforce is 98% female, and we are providing opportunities for women in the creative arts, whether they are directors, writers, producers or performers.”

The production company has brought in specific working practices to make it easier for women to continue working in the arts and is working to ensure that they are providing fair pay for the work opportunities they are providing.

Rebecca said: “We work with the needs of those in our team and this can include things like longer lunch breaks for pregnant women, flexible hours to allow women to work around childcare and welcoming children and babies into the rehearsal room. We ignore CV breaks where women have lost years to childcare and are trying to re-enter the industry.

She continued: “We work to the industry standard for above-living wage pay and Equity advised pay, and we also create networks for travel and accommodation so women can travel and stay comfortably and safely. We try to be flexible with hours and keep an open dialogue about time and hours so that women - who are more likely to need second jobs to stay in arts - can support themselves and their dependants and not have to give up other work to take up work with us.”

The Women in Theatre Forum Report – published in 2021 - collated research from multiple organisations and showed sustained levels of inequality for women. It warned that underrepresentation needs to “be taken seriously” and called for the government’s Cultural Renewal Taskforce and Arts Council England (ACE) to revisit their strategies to deal with the issue of gender disparity.

The report was a collaboration between Sphinx Theatre, University Women in the Arts and December Group and was carried out in partnership with trade unions Equity and Writers’ Guild of Great Britain, Black Women in Theatre, Stage Directors UK, Era 50:50 and Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (Pipa).

The report’s findings highlighted issues including the burden of care for female performers -with eight out of 10 women forced to turn down work due to parenting or caring responsibilities - and the lack of female leadership in theatre. It also discussed gender imbalance in film – a field where 16% of working filmmakers are female, and 14% of prime-time TV is written by women.

To discover more about the work of Scary Little Girls, visit:

[www.scarylittlegirls.co.uk](http://www.scarylittlegirls.co.uk)

**Case Studies**

**Kezia Dwyer, documentary film producer, Brighton**

I am the General Manager for Scary Little Girls, and I'm based near Brighton. Having just graduated with my Masters in Directing Documentary, I work for Scary Little Girls part-time while also pursuing documentary work. Working with the team in a flexible part-time manner not only supports me financially while I work on creative film projects but also provides me with lots of transferable skills.

Through this role as General Manager, I've been able to learn about funding applications (very relevant for anyone working in the arts), develop ideas for content creation, and put forward documentary proposals (with the hope of developing these into films/content).

Scary Little Girls is always open to my ideas about how to bring together my documentary skills and my work for the company, and their consistent support allows me to gain extra strings to my bow while also offering creative opportunities.

**Flo Perlin Li, contemporary folk singer, London**

At 17 years old, I had my dream set on working in music, whether that was writing my own music or being a session cello player. I was very lucky to have the opportunity to play cello for Scary Little Girls in their Cabarets which were in various venues in London and at End of The Road Festival. This was different to anything I had done before. I was performing in new environments and was introduced to female professionals within the arts.

Working with Scary Little Girls boosted my confidence tremendously as they empowered me to go out of my comfort zone, learn music by ear, perform to bigger crowds and learn from professionals in the industry. These experiences changed the way I thought about working in music in terms of the limitations for women. I felt a strong desire to get my foot in the door and I started experimenting with different instruments.

The work of Scary Little Girls is incredibly important for women and girls because it gives them a platform to use their voices and demonstrates their ability to articulate their views through the arts.

The role of women in the arts is fundamental as it gives them a voice and allows them to break down the barriers that so often silence women. To this day, I have continued to write music and have been blossoming in the arts (Baghdad, over 1.6 million Spotify streams). My music is very much influenced by the work I did with Scary Little Girls and for that, I am very grateful.

**Christina Li, musician and songwriter, San Francisco**

I have been an associate artist with Scary Little Girls since 2013. SLG is an inspiring, collaborative environment of mostly women and has challenged both my artistic skill and mindset multiple times in the last decade.

Before working with Scary Little Girls, I was primarily a singer-songwriter trying traditional methods of collaborating with music. Rebecca introduced me to new theatrical formats like the living literature walk and cabarets, which I was challenged to create within. Opportunities for free expression and collaboration, especially paid ones, are few and far between. And fewer still are collaborations between many women of different skills.

Scary Little Girls’ associate artist network is truly a community that’s been lovingly fostered by SLG through meetups and various connecting projects. I have been lucky to listen to women’s true experiences in the professional theatre world - stories unlikely to have been shared in mostly male rooms but need to be. S

Scary Little Girls began the fight for women in the arts two decades ago - before #metoo, before Epstein - creating inspirational, educational art and safe artistic spaces for the generation trying to grapple with these questions now. I have personally learned so much about history and social movements through my experience with Scary Little Girls.

This spirit of feminist and creative collaboration without moral or qualitative compromise is what drives Scary Little Girls and draws so many talented artists to their circle. They have continually provided the local community thought-provoking and accessible art, sometimes in daft costumes or with snacks, and the local artists with a place to play.

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**ENDS**

**Photography**

Images can be downloaded [here](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MTmegpJ7Gen7huPfoadmc7Xj7GGwvS-H?usp=sharing).

**Sources:**

***Women in Theatre Forum Report***<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/jan/13/uk-report-reveals-disgraceful-gender-inequality-in-the-arts>

***Big Freelancer Survey 2023***

<https://freelancersmaketheatrework.com/bigfreelancersurvey/2023report/#:~:text=1156%20theatre%20freelancers%20took%20part,small%20to%20draw%20reliable%20conclusions>)

**Media Enquiries**

Rebecca Mordan, Artistic Director of Scary Little Girls, is available for interview.

All requests to be directed to:

Lauren Webb

Roscoe Communications

[lauren@talktoroscoe.com](about:blank)

07915 083079

**Editorial Notes**

**About Scary Little Girls**

Scary Little Girls is a feminist production hub with a passion for stories that are historically or culturally excluded, or usually told from one perspective only. We actively create jobs for women, cross-collaborating and skills sharing for the benefit of the artistic and wider community and are committed to the creative case for diversity.

SLG employs around 100 artists annually, reaches live audiences of 25,000, creating both indoor and outside work and collaborating and touring with artistic partners, commissioners, pubs, libraries, town councils, and venues from Penzance to John O Groats. The diversity of our projects is unified by our overriding belief in the power of stories to change society, our love for our audiences and our dedication to improving human and women’s experiences.

This gives us a unique, wide reach, despite being a small organisation, and a devoted, growing audience who demand that we keep innovating and risk-taking.

**DO WE NEED FUNDER INFORMATION?**

**About Shared Prosperity Fund**

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK Government’s Levelling Up

agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund

aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK by investing in

communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.

For more information, visit:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperityfund-prospectus.

**Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Good Growth programme**

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly have been allocated £137m for local investment through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. With a focus on green and inclusive growth, we’ll use our portion to achieve Good Growth for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, providing opportunities for communities and businesses and giving residents access to new jobs and training. For more information, visit https://ciosgoodgrowth.com