

GWENDA'S GARAGE



IMPACT REPORT 2026



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

SHEFFIELD THEATRES



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.





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.

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

JACKSTAGE

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

THE PEG REVIEW

PRESS REVIEWS

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

ALL THAT DAZZLES

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

NORTH WEST END

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

DIVA MAGAZINE

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

THE STAGE

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

GUARDIAN

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

TIME OUT

'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

Funny and emotional at the same time. Felt kinda like home.

Nostalgic, emotional, joyous, hopeful

Sad, uplifted, joyous

Reflective, questioning the impacts of Section 28 in our lives, without being conscious, as we were young

Angry, proud, a bit uplifted

It felt beautiful and important

AUDIENCE RESPONSE

AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

AUDIENCE NUMBERS

Sheffield: 2401, 87%

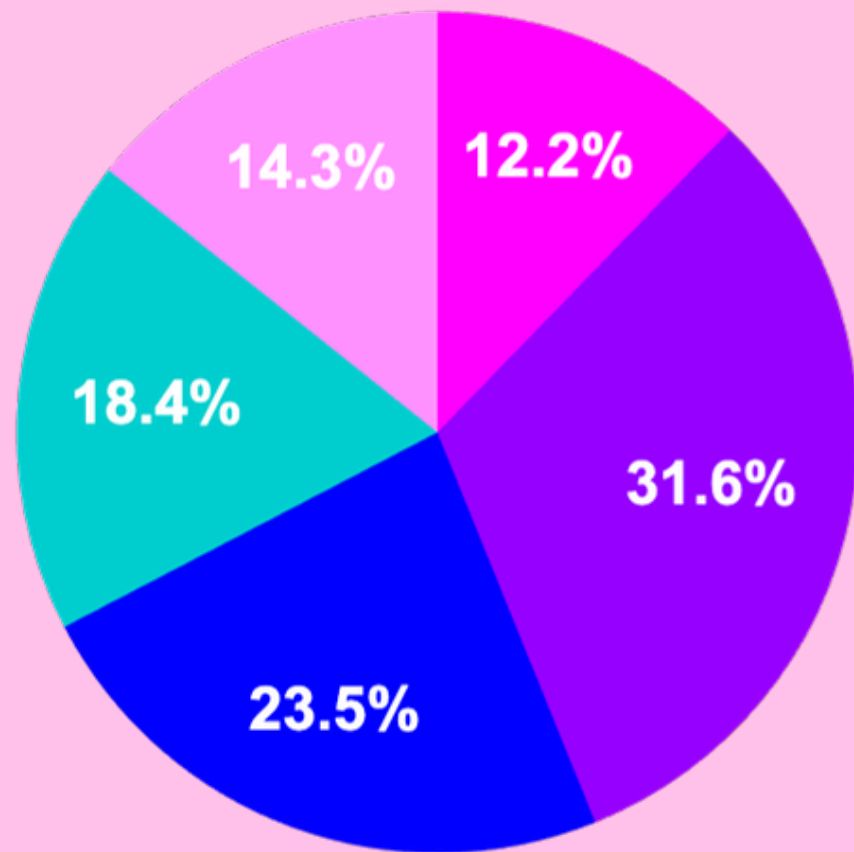
London: 4599, 79%

Total: 7000, 81%

*The below figures are based on those who completed our feedback form

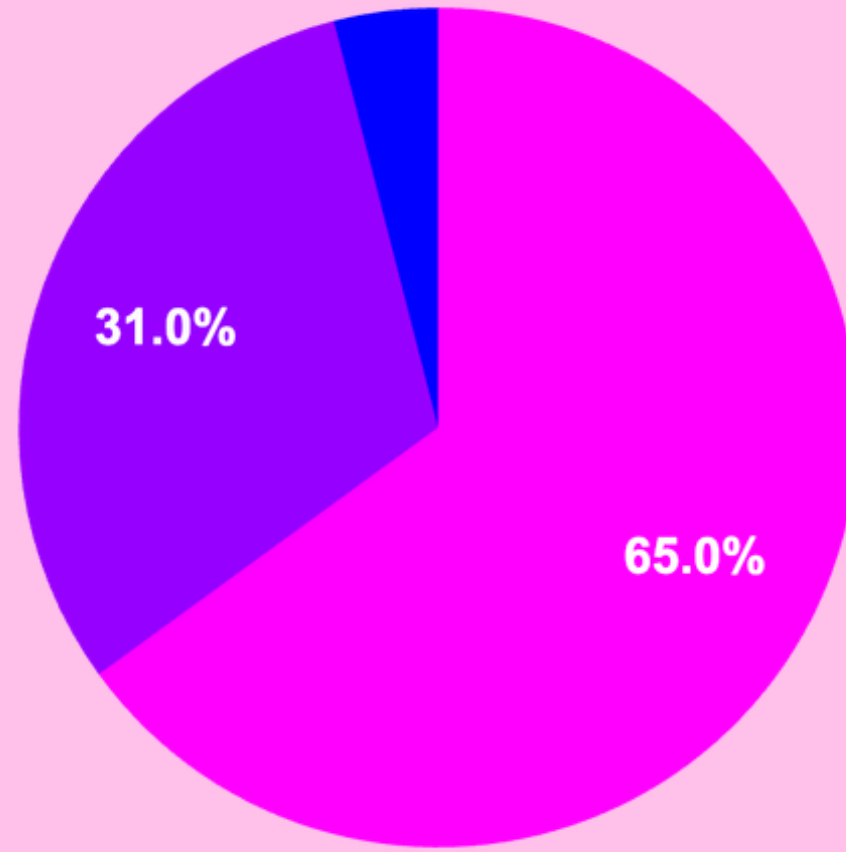


AGE



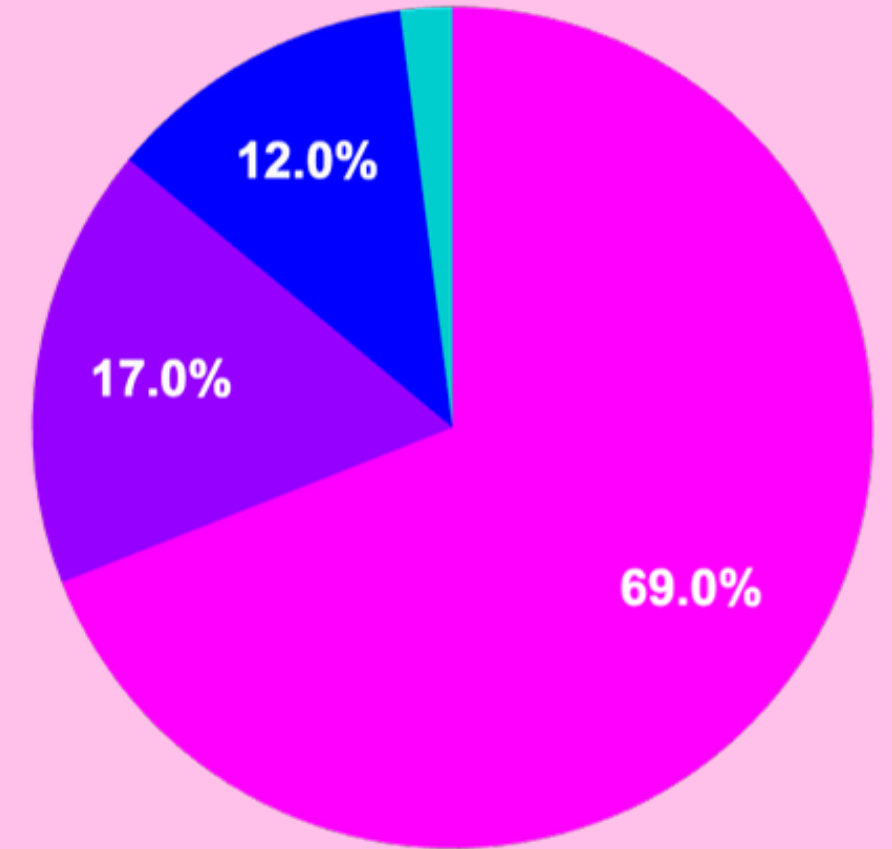
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-49
- 50-64
- 65+

LGBTQIA+



- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

GENDER IDENTITY

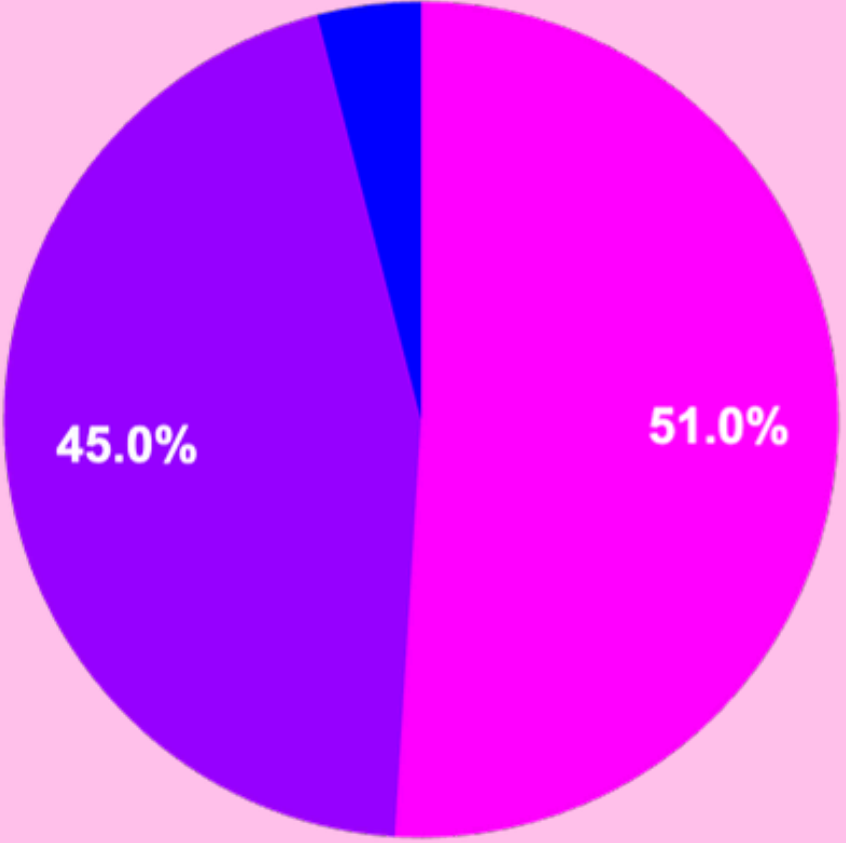


- Woman
- Non-Binary
- Man
- Prefer not to say



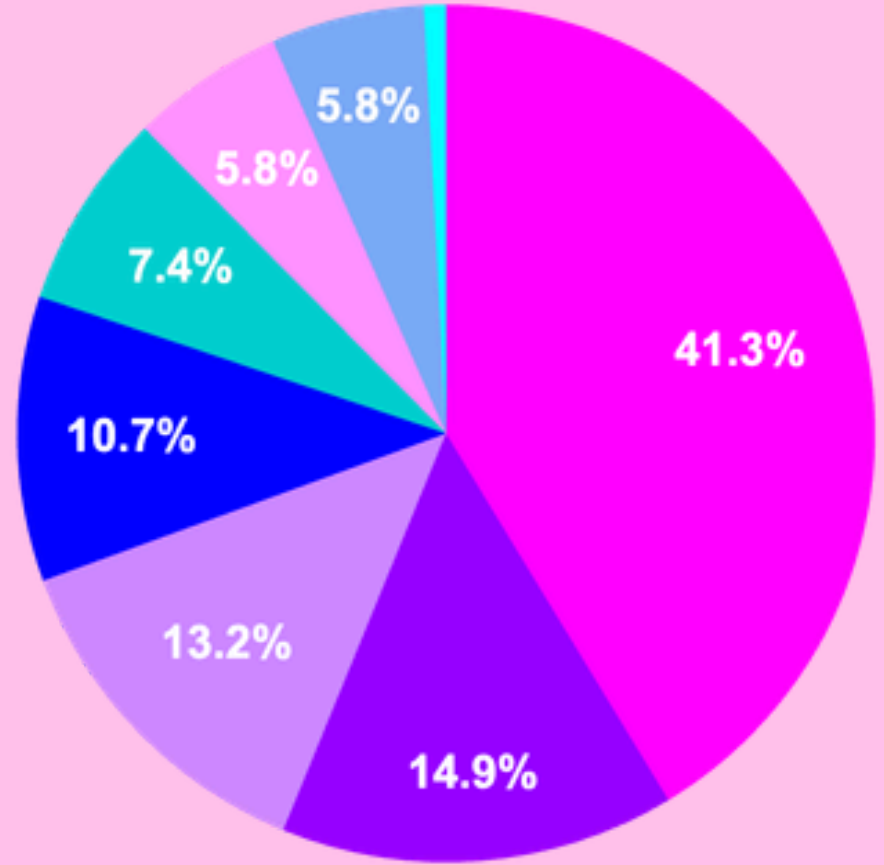
*The below figures are based on those who completed our feedback form

DISABILITY



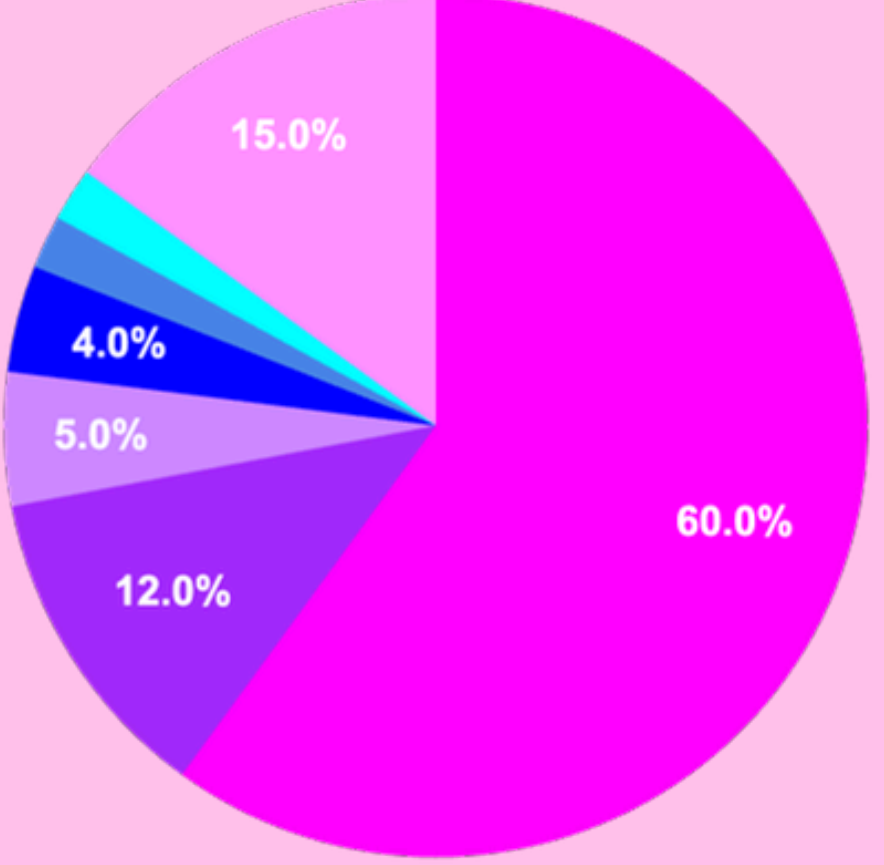
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

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



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.

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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.

