

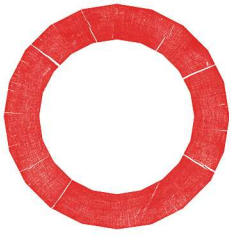
Such Stuff podcast
Season 8, Episode 3: Connection

Jemimah: It's the making the connection, the fact that we all have that in common. That we're volunteering in a place that is a shared loved organization. It doesn't matter whether you have a love just in Shakespeare, or just in theatre, or just in volunteering, that connects us all. And then, you can just talk about anything and everything, and share. That has really been what I've noticed this year, I've missed having that connection with my fellow stewards, but also then sharing that out with our audiences, or any staff who attend. Theatre makes you have that connection, because there's already that base commonality of you've all come to this place today, you've all come to experience something. You maybe don't know what, yet. But that already gives you a ground to start a conversation and start a connection.

[Music Playing]

Imogen Greenberg: Hello, and welcome to another episode of Such Stuff, the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe. In this next episode in our series on arts and wellbeing, we turn to the question of connection. In this series, we've been exploring the ways the arts can enrich our lives, help us tackle mental health issues, and help us to find expression and connection again, after a year of isolation. Of course, connection has been one of the vital things we've all been missing.

So, what are the connections that art spaces can bring, and how can that impact our mental health? Of course, there's the connection between a viewer, a creator, a participant and the artwork itself, a resonance we've talked about in previous episodes. And, out of that resonance can come a connection with the self, a moment of understanding or recognition, which allows reflection. But, there's also, with theatre in particular, a moment of connection with a fellow audience of strangers, joined together for one night in a shared experience.



So in this episode, we'll be speaking to two of our wonderful volunteers. Night after night, day after day, performances at the Globe can only happen thanks to the extraordinary contribution of our eclectic, committed and joyful volunteers. Every season, they watch countless performances and meet so many of the audience members who come through our doors. Who better to speak on the elusive but extraordinary power of connection? So I chatted to Jemimah and Alistair about why they volunteer, how it impacts them and why they think connection is so important for wellbeing.

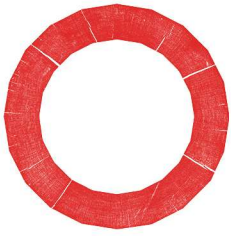
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As we come out of lockdown, we're thinking about how the arts can play a role in restoring some sense or normality but without forgetting everything that's come before. So, it's what role can the arts play in wellbeing, both individual and collective? And, we'll be taking a bit of a look at the links between arts and wellbeing. We're breaking that down into different things, so we're looking at creativity, we're looking at that kind of thing.

One of the things that I wanted to look at in particular was connection. And, the first thing I thought of was the Globe's volunteers, because I think that it brings together a huge, huge group of people from lots of different backgrounds and places, and with a lot of different motivations to get involved. Thank you so much, both of you, for joining us and chatting today.

If you don't mind, can I just start by asking how you got involved with volunteering at the Globe?

Jemimah: Okay. I got involved with the globe in oh, 2014 now, a while ago. The previous year, a friend of mine had booked tickets for us to come to a midnight matinee. And this I have to admit, which I don't think I've admitted to any other steward, I fainted that night. It'd been a very long day, I hadn't had enough to eat and drink, I was right at the front for *Midsummer Night's Dream* and I fainted. And, I couldn't believe how quick, the stewards were there right away. A duty manager came with a wheelchair, took me out,



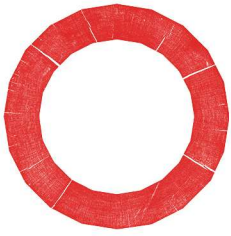
was so friendly, so polite. The steward stayed with me, made sure I felt okay, made sure to keep me in touch with everything that was going on in the theatre that I was missing. I was just absolutely amazed because I'd never received such service from a theatre, I'd never felt so looked after, so cared for. They really knew their stuff about the building.

I'd had an interest in Shakespeare beforehand, and I was studying literature at university at the time. They were talking about the place with such love, I knew I'd wanted to come back, I wanted to see more, and I wanted to get involved. I came back for a few more shows that year, and then in 2014, I applied to be a steward. And was very lucky, got through, came in for my open day. Again, it was like walking in and suddenly, you were family. That was it. You lived there, you belonged there, and it just gave me so much confidence, and made me realize that this place had something really special about it.

Imogen Greenberg: What about you, Alistair?

Alistair: I've been a steward for about four years, now. I've been involved in theatre since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. I just hadn't come to the Globe until probably five years ago, and I came with a friend. And, it was just that immense awe of walking in and going back in time. It was just fantastic. I had the biggest smile on my face, I don't think it disappeared for the whole production. Just like Jemimah, I came back a few more times. I suddenly thought, "Whoa, I need more of this. I've got to come back again."

And then, again, very much I chatted to one of the stewards who was actually in the yard, I was in the yard. Then, I thought, "Well, how do you get involved?" They started to tell me. I thought, "Do you know what? I've got to be involved in this." I can come as an audience member, but I want to be involved in the nitty-gritty. This is just such an iconic place. I applied, and came up for the interview, and was accepted. And, I found the whole experience so professional. All the training, the friendliness of the stewards. I just cannot wait to get back through those doors again.



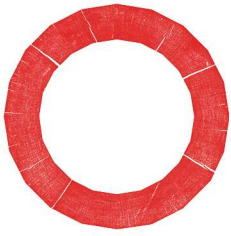
Imogen Greenberg: It sounds like both of you had an interest in the arts before you started to volunteer. What's different about volunteering? You touched on this already. But, what is it about that closeness that appealed to you?

Jemimah: You learn an entirely different side to the theatre. It's not only the building, and how the building runs, and how to keep everybody safe. It's the people you interact with, the audience members, even the actors as they come running past you covered in blood. You get an entirely different experience from it.

And, the knowledge is invaluable. The knowledge I've had through being a steward at the Globe has coloured my entire professional life afterwards. Everything I've learned, from customer service, from even how you carry yourself, how that changes your interaction with someone, the tone of your voice. To then, how you can talk to and approach actors and professionals and start a conversation with them about, "Oh, so what do you get when you're performing, compared to what we get when we're watching it or when we're working?"

It starts conversations, being a steward, and volunteering just adds that extra layer to it because you realize you're doing this because you love it. It's something that is important to you, and therefore you treat your role with the uttermost respect, you treat all the staff with respect, and you get it back as well. Which is really lovely, that everyone whose there really appreciates the fact that you're there and you're helping.

Alistair: I think you touch on a few things that I agree wholeheartedly with. I think for me, volunteering, you become being an extension of the Globe and the Globe family and everything. I've very proud to be a part of that. I think having worked in theatres, and being involved with front of house, backstage and everything, front of house and stewarding in the Globe is a different beast all together. Because yes, actors are coming past you, you're



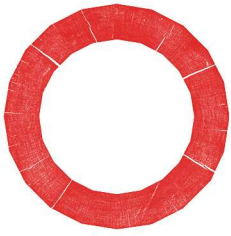
interacting people from all around the world, maybe English is not their first language.

For me, that big smile and that reaction I had, when you see that on the audiences coming in, it's just absolutely such a buzz. To be involved in making their experience a happy, secure one as well, I can't think of anything better, to be honest.

Imogen Greenberg: In the series as a whole, we're looking at this connection between arts and wellbeing, and I mean that in the broadest sense. Firstly, does that link mean anything to you? And, has volunteering had an impact on your wellbeing? How have you seen that connection in the theatre, through the process of you guys volunteering?

Jemimah: It definitely had a very big impact for me. I was 20 when I started volunteering. Very shy, quite quiet, didn't really know how to approach things. I'd volunteered in other contexts, like with Girl Guiding and various other organizations, but never such in a front-facing role and having that different kind of responsibility. I have previously had issues with anxiety, and at that time it was a very big step for me to take to even to apply to become a steward, let alone then actually have to do the job.

Being walked through it by such experienced staff, who took the time to take that into account and be really supportive throughout, by the end of my first year there I just was an entirely different person. I'd learned so many skills, and I'd learned that, actually, I quite like talking to people. I like finding who they are, what they've been doing, why they've come today, why they're interested in Shakespeare. Even say, you have different experiences, you have young families come in and the children are just absolutely in awe, or suddenly get terrified by something. And your role changes because you're suddenly then going, "Oh, it'll be all right. It'll be fine." Previously to volunteering at the Globe, I would have had the confidence to do that. Seeing how the other stewards handle their situations really taught me how to do it.

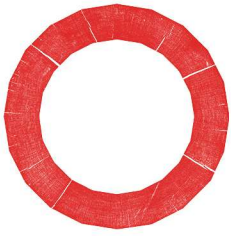


I will say that, for all the years I've been volunteering at the Globe, my mental health has been in a much better place when I know I've got a shift coming up. Because no matter how bad my day's been, how difficult work has been, I'm going to a place where I feel comfortable, secure, and I've got people I know I'm going to see that I'm excited to see. And I get to have a new experience, every time I'm there. That's something to then look forward to, it's less of the workplace anxiety that perhaps a lot of us have been used to, especially this past year. Instead, it's "I'm going home. I'm going to see all the people I like in the place I love to talk about, and I get to do something new this time."

Alistair: I think wellbeing in the arts is very, very important. And for theatre, it's particularly so, in a way, because you're entering into this magical land. If a theatre is good, it's absorbing, it's immersive and everything. That's not just for us as stewards, that's for the actors, the technical crew, backstage, front of house, everybody. You do lose yourself, and you feel good, and you smile. It is that safe mental environment that you're in, for a period of time.

I know I have missed ... Well, we've all had problems with the lockdown, and being on our own and everything, but I have certainly missed my trips to London, and going into the stewards' room. And again, finding out what people have been doing. It means different things to different people. Some people are very in for Shakespeare, some people like volunteering, some people like meeting people. It doesn't matter, the common factor is we are there, making experience better for people, but also we get the return as well.

Jemimah: It's the making the connection, the fact that we all have that in common. That we're volunteering in a place that is a shared loved organization. It doesn't matter whether you have a love just in Shakespeare, or just in theatre, or just in volunteering, that connects us all. And then, you can just talk about anything and everything, and share. That has really been what I've noticed this year, I've missed having that connection with my fellow stewards, but also then sharing that out with our audiences, or any staff who



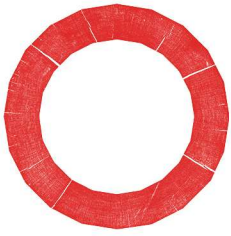
attend. Theatre makes you have that connection, because there's already that base commonality of you've all come to this place today, you've all come to experience something. You maybe don't know what, yet. But, that already gives you a ground to start a conversation and start a connection.

Alistair: I think the Globe is quite different. Again, if you take a standard theatre with your audiences and front of house, we are almost an extension of the actors, I see it. We're part of putting the colour on the whole of the Globe and everything, and interacting with them. And, talking to people in the yard. I think it's one of those things if you make the effort as a steward, and I believe you should, you've got to make that experience as good as what's on the stage. I know it's cliché, but we're sometimes the first people those audience see, and we're probably the last when we say, "Cheerio!." We're the bookends to the whole theatre experience.

Imogen Greenberg: What have you learned, just from watching shows and watching audiences? You guys have been doing this for so many years now, I'm curious as ... You watch the same show however many times, you see people come through the doors however many times. What is it that you see, again and again? What do you notice when you're volunteering?

Jemimah: I see people aren't prepared to necessarily have the impact that the building on its own makes. So people see it from the outside, they see it from South Bank, and they just walk past it. The thing you see, again and again, is people walk in and suddenly gasp, and that's before anything's even started. It's just the first impression, walking in, over and over again. It's a delight to see because there's not many theatre spaces where people walk in and instantly are just looking around, searching for all of the little hidden bits and pieces, just taking it in before the action starts.

And then, again, the thing you see over and over is they don't necessarily expect to become part of the play. They're not just there to stand and watch. They are living, breathing audience members, therefore they are going to be in this play one way or another.



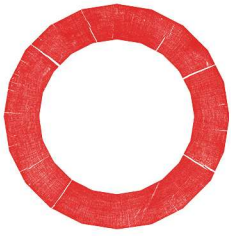
Whether you're pretending to be a tree in Burnham Forest, or whether someone talks to you directly and asks you a question, and stands and waits for your answer. It takes people aback, because they just don't expect to be involved. There's no other theatre I've been to that does it as well as the Globe does.

Alistair: You know, I think you're right. It is that going back in time, where that's how theatre was, but it is that fun side when people come in, as you priorly say, and their mouth drops. As my mine did, when I first walked in, and I thought I knew theatre, I thought I'd seen it all, but not. All those joyous things that, if it's raining and then somebody walks in and goes, "Oh, well I didn't realize there wasn't a roof on it."

And again, as been said, when you watch the audience and you know the actors are coming in through one of their doors, and they're hovering there, waiting for their cues to go in. You know the reaction that's going to happen and you just wait for it, because as they push past ... I think for a lot of the audience, that surprises them. They don't understand that they are almost part of the whole process as well.

Jemimah: I'd say the one thing that is different every time is the questions you get from the audience. I mean, I've had wonderful ones like, "Does this building have air conditioning," which is just fantastic. And, some of the most delightful questions that come from children about what they've picked up on. They go, "Why are they such a bad person?" It's wonderful that, any time I'm on a shift, I will probably be asked a question I've not been asked before. That keeps you on your toes, because sometimes you've got to be quick about how to answer that. The air conditioning one, I was standing outside door four and I just said to them, "When you go in, look up." I eventually went in to stand on my stewarding shift and they want, "Oh, I understand what you mean now. There's no roof."

But, it's just an absolute delight that you have some things, as you say, that you look out for, you know are going to happen. You've seen the show 10 times, you know the actor's going to come



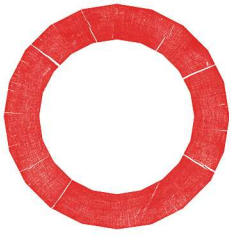
through and someone's going to get spooked or going to have to move. And on the other side, it is so different because you're like, "Well, I would never in a million years asked that question if I came here."

Alistair: I think the excitement of audiences that come and see theatre in that format means that they do want to ask those questions. They actually come up to you, which is not what you'd expect in another theatre, because they're hungry for information. And again, you've got the "Oh, this building's in very good condition, since it was first built back in whenever," you know. You answer the questions, you treat them all seriously and everything, no matter how many they are.

Imogen Greenberg: We often talk about volunteering as giving up your time, but as you guys have made it abundantly clear, there's a lot that you get from volunteering as well. If someone was asking you, "Why should I volunteer at the globe, should I volunteer at the globe," what would you tell them to encourage them to get involved, and to illustrate the way that it can enrich your life?

Jemimah: It's different because I don't think of it as giving up my time, it's me happily giving away my time. I would happily give as many hours as possible. If I didn't have to work, I would happily volunteer at the Globe every day because it's just a fantastic place to be. What you get from it is you do get this entirely second family of diverse, wonderful people who you can learn so much from. And, they're willing to listen to you, and guide you through all sorts of things, give you advice. I would not have got through my Master's in Shakespeare without the Globe volunteer team. They were fantastic, throughout.

But, you get a sense of you grow in confidence, you learn how to be patient with customers. You learn more about how you hold yourself in difficult situations, because it's not always simple on shift. You do sometimes have to stand your ground a bit and say, "No, you cannot sit in the yard." There's so many values that will stand you in really good stead if you go somewhere else as well. But, the Globe



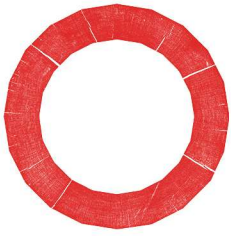
takes the time to teach you, and to make you feel comfortable as well. They will never ask you to do something you're not comfortable with, which is really key for anyone who has any nerves or anxiety around entering a new role. You can talk to someone and they'll understand, and they'll sort something out for you. Or perhaps, once you feel a bit more confident they'll say, "Okay, now how about we try this? We'll put you on with an experienced steward." Or, "We'll give you a buddy, and they'll be there to support you."

I just think it's a fantastic place to volunteer if you're looking to be involved in the arts, if you're looking to be an active volunteer that has so many things to do. And, if you're looking for somewhere that will make you feel safe and valued, the Globe is the place to go.

Alistair: I think it's also interesting, with regards to other people asking about volunteers because sometimes, people don't realize we're volunteers until they ask. And then, you get into conversation. I take myself back to when I was there in the yard, leaning on the stage, and these two stewards that were actually there as audience members. I think, because they were so open and encouraging, and saying, "Look, if you enjoy theatre, if you love theatre, this is a marvelous place to be."

I remember at the time, asking them about the training that Jemimah's alluded to, the quality of training. Because it could be daunting, because it's so iconic, because it's so different there's always that thing, "Well, would I be able to do that?" In some respects, I'm quite confident but I've got other sides of me that wasn't as confident. I know the Globe as brought that out in me and that confidence. As Jemimah said, when everything's going right, that's fine. It's when things are going wrong, that's when you earn your medal.

I felt a bit cheated, because I was hoping to up my shifts until this COVID hit. I'm so looking forward to getting back into helping the audiences.



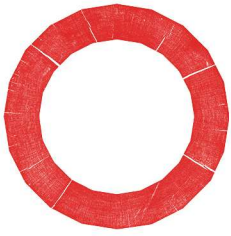
Imogen Greenberg: What are you most looking forward to, when you get back into the theatre in May?

Jemimah: I just want to see everyone. We've had Zoom parties and quizzes, which are wonderful to see everyone, but you don't get to talk like you usually would. Because I travel quite a distance and I've been known to be first one in the stewards' room, an hour early compared to everyone else, just because of the trains. The first person that walks in, you can guarantee you'll end up talking for 20 minutes. And then the next person will come in, and you'll talk for 20 minutes.

All these little life updates, we've not had for a year. And, everyone's lives have changed so much in the last year. I think it's coming together, and being able to not only catch up, but then be there for each other and say, "Oh gosh, that must have been difficult. Is there anything I can do now, to help you? Is there anything that you're looking forward to that we can talk about?" Those conversations, they're not even anything to do about the volunteering or the shift, it's just knowing these people who you might only spend a four-hour shift together, but you learn a whole world about them.

That's what I'm looking forward to, all of us being able to come together safely, and to start those connections again. And, just be able to lean on each other a bit, while it's still going to be difficult and challenging to come back together. But, I have every faith that all the stewards are going to be there and be able to support each other through it, no matter how different things are. We are still the same people, we will still come together and have a wonderful time.

Alistair: I've missed the theatre, I've missed the stewards. I've made some very good friends, people that I would never have been friends with. That doesn't mean to say it's steeped in Shakespeare, it's just general friendship and camaraderie, and sharing those life events. It's always quite fun, where you never quite know sometimes whose going to be on shift, and suddenly you might not see somebody for three months because your shift pattern just



doesn't happen. It's that, "Oh hi, I haven't seen you for ages. What have you been up to?"

It really starts the minute you walk into the Globe itself. I am looking forward to it, greatly, and I'm hoping to even get on the shift on the 19th May, because that's my birthday. I can't think of a better birthday present, to be back stewarding at the Globe.

Jemimah: I actually once had an audience member ask me, "What is the Globe like when it's empty?" I thought, "What a strange question." And then, I thought back to all the times that I'd been there early, or I'd been the first person in the stewards group to make it from the room into the theatre, and the Globe is special because it always feels like it's just lying in wait. It never feels closed, it doesn't feel empty. There always is a sense of anticipation, something is going to happen. There's always something going on, and I am so excited to feel that again, that anticipation of there's going to be a shared experience here today that can never be repeated. Even if you brought these same people back, it can't be repeated. So aside from seeing the wonderful stewards, that is the other thing I'm most excited for.

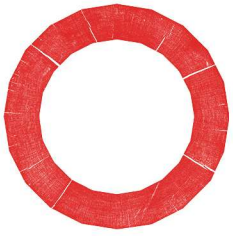
Imogen Greenberg: Thank you so much. Unless there's anything you guys want to add?

Alistair: No. Can you just make sure I'm on shift on the 19th May, please?

Imogen Greenberg: If only I had such power. I'm sure Rosie will do right by you.

[Music Playing]

That's it from us, but if you want to find out more about the Globe's volunteers, please do visit our website. And if, like Jemimah and Alistair, you cannot wait to get back through the doors of the Globe Theatre, visit our website to book tickets for the summer season. We couldn't be more excited to be welcoming you back through our



doors, safely and securely, so do check out the wonderful season we've got coming up.

You've been listening to Such Stuff with me, Imogen Greenberg. To find out more about Shakespeare's Globe and what's on, follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. We'll be back soon with more stories from Shakespeare's Globe, so subscribe wherever you get this podcast from.