

Greenhouse Theatre

Q&A with Oli Savage from Greenhouse Theatre, a zero-waste theatre, now focusing on education and community building whilst looking for a new home

At a glance

What triggered your desire to create the Greenhouse Theatre?

Location
Various

It came about from the Edinburgh Fringe originally. In 2017 I (Oli) was on tour, and a collaborator I was working with had a script focusing on ecoterrorism, which stuck in my mind. About a year later I was on a tour which ended at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The production was A Midsummer Night's Dream, and it sold out. We were still flyering on The Mile, as many people do, and realised 'why were we bothering?' Not only had the show sold out anyway, but the flyering was also wasteful. It started us thinking about the environmental impact of the Fringe overall.

Tags

Zero-waste
Operations
Pop-up venue

This started conversations and in 2018/2019 we set ourselves the goal of making the most environmentally conscious show or project possible. For us, this would require it to be built from the ground up. It went well: we ended up with a pretty building, people liked it and we ended up managing to sell a few thousand tickets.



What does a typical project look like for you?

Our work is all about connection for audiences, creating exciting, brilliant work which connects audiences with community and with the natural world around them. Usually our shows don't necessarily focus on the climate or ecological crisis itself, but more about how do we relate to the natural world and how do we fit into our communities? Plenty of studies show that people feel less helpless about things, particularly the climate, when they feel they are acting as part of a community.

What was your building process for the pop-up venue?

We didn't get any builders or architects involved, but we included the Greenhouse tea, artists, designers and set designers all contributing their ideas. Once the design was concluded, we worked with set builders to build. We performed in the summer so didn't need heating but were looking into options for producing our own electricity, and insulation. The materials we used for the building were reclaimed wood, reclaimed corrugated PVC, and a second-hand lighting truss.

Could you tell us more about how you made the operations of running the venue sustainable?

We had zero-waste operations from the start, and were creating everything from scratch. Lots of fringe companies end up being fairly zero-waste due to lack of budget, but doing it for sustainability reasons is often not (yet) embedded.

We knew we had to think about Scope 1 and Scope 3 in particular. Scope 2 felt less important as we were using so little electricity. We wanted to think about the whole audience journey and how that whole process can be zero-waste.

We got our wine from Sustainable Wine Solutions who deliver wine like milkmen do, taking back bottles to refill. The beer came from Toast Brewing who make beer from surplus bread. We built our own bar, using second-hand piping, and Toast provided cups. On the whole we found sustainable answers were simple, we didn't need crazy high-tech solutions, a lot of it was about looking to how people did things in the past and considering the process from start to finish before acting.

What responses did you get?

We never got any negative responses. Audiences loved the theatre, and venues were usually positive and helpful. Most of the venues we talked to were really excited to host, the only issue it ever came down to was money.

What was the legacy of the pop-up venue?

Doing to pop-up venue was brilliant and a great experience, but not financially viable due to a lack of funding and being a relatively expensive project. We are therefore having to leave that behind. However, we think the legacy of the po-up is that it made people think differently about what being green means. We want to remind people that art is a public good in itself, but it is also beholden to things like environmental sustainability, anti-racism, accessibility, and so on. We also want people to be aware of how easy it was in many ways: sustainable procurement doesn't have to be impossible, there are so many places online to get things second-hand, or community wood recycling groups.

If anyone is interested in hearing more about the pop-up venue email oli@greenhousetheatre.com

What is next for Greenhouse Theatre?

We are currently looking for a new [home](#). We are also running Carbon Literacy Training, and consulting for sustainable theatre. If anyone would like to hear more about either of these please email: oli@greenhousetheatre.com.

Greenhouse Theatre also provide Carbon Literacy Training. Please do get in touch if you are interested in finding out more: info@thegreenhousetheatre.com



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