

One of the UK's leading theatre companies for learning disabled actors, Lung Ha celebrates four decades of brilliant theatre-making



Special anniversary photo shoot featuring Lung Ha Theatre Company Ensemble at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. Credit Pete Dibdin.

17th April 2024

High-res version of the [image](#) available [here](#).

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Lung Ha is an Edinburgh-based theatre company for actors and theatre makers with a learning disability and autism which produces award-winning productions and works with a year-round, 25-strong Ensemble to develop their practice and remove barriers to participation into the arts.

April marks the start of 12 months of the Company's 40th anniversary celebrations which will see it take part in or present:

A remounting of the Company's 2021 hit *An Unexpected Hiccup* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the world's biggest stage. Originally created and performed under strict COVID procedures during the global pandemic, the show is a tale of comic misunderstandings, sinister goings on and dangerous eccentricities.

This will also be the inaugural production of the **Lung Ha Touring Company** which will provide further opportunities for performers to create and tour new and existing work, with bespoke and specialist actor training.

An *Unexpected Hiccup* is a co-production with Plutôt La Vie featuring five Lung Ha actors, written by Michael Duke after a devising process with the Company. It will be presented between 2 and 10 August at Zoo Southside.

The Company is also commissioning initial research to develop an **Access and Creative Principles Toolkit** which will support the launch of Lung Ha Touring Company. The research aims to cover three main areas:

1. To understand the access support structures required for learning-disabled actors in a professional company.
2. To apply fair and equitable pay remuneration frameworks for ourselves and other theatre companies working with actors and artists in receipt of varied and complex benefit arrangements.
3. To create a practical toolkit for working with learning-disabled actors which has a wider culture sector benefit and application.

The first publication of findings is expected in spring 2025. The project is funded by RS Macdonald Charitable Trust.

Lung Ha Theatre Company has been invited as a guest contributor at the **Europe In Action Conference, a partnership between Inclusion Europe and Enable in May 2024 in Glasgow during Learning Disability Awareness Week**, hosted by Enable who are also marking an anniversary year (70th). The Company will be hosting the closing session of the conference with the theme of deinstitutionalisation, including a presentation about the Company's work and a focus on the award-winning production *Castle Lennox* from 2023.

Also in May, Lung Ha Theatre Company will host the **World Premiere of its short film, *Love Like Salt***, at Traverse Theatre – a loose adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, featuring the Lung Ha Ensemble and co-created by Maria Oller, Susan Worsfold and Stuart Platt. The evening will also feature a short snippet from an anniversary documentary about the Company made and edited by a Lung Ha actor, Emma McCaffrey.

Throughout the year Lung Ha will be spotlighting our Ensemble actors using **commissioned portraits** from photographer and long-time collaborator Peter Dibden. The photoshoot was a glamorous "Met gala meets night at the theatre" extravaganza. The actors were given the opportunity to curate their own costumes and threw themselves into model poses and characterful performances which are beautifully captured in this series and in our commemorative 40th anniversary Ensemble group photograph.

Short history of Lung Ha

Lung Ha Theatre Company began its life as Lung Ha's Theatre Company in October 1984. A sixty strong team of performers, with a learning disability, under the direction of Richard Vallis and Peter Clerke created and performed their own version of the fabled Monkey stories (for a time the Company was called Lung Ha's Monkey Theatre). The production was hugely successful and a new company and vitally important new theatrical voice launched onto the Scottish stage, now a vital part of it.

Since then, the Company has worked with over three hundred performers with a learning disability creating over forty original productions. The Company and has also worked with some of the leading artists and creative organisations across the country and toured internationally to England, France, Ireland, Poland, Sweden and Finland.

Some of the Company's achievements include the Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland (CATS) for Best Ensemble in *Huxley's Lab* in 2009 (co-recipient with Grid Iron Theatre Company) and for *Castle Lennox*, a 2023 co-production with The Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh.

Now the company offers a range of creative opportunities for learning disabled actors. Our Pathway for Progression features six strands of work where actors can access training and performing opportunities in an inclusive and welcoming environment and on an established platform. These are The Lung Ha Ensemble, Lung Ha Touring Company, Lung Ha Across Scotland (an online nationwide actor training workshop series), Creative Development (one to one skills development, mentoring and critical response), Sharing our Expertise (via our Access and Creative Principles Toolkit, and workshop leader training), and Supporting External Opportunities (where the Lung Ha team prepares and supports people with their creative ambitions outwith Lung Ha).

Quotes

Artistic Director Maria Oller and Executive Director Ruth McEwan said: *Entering our 40th year, we are so proud of our achievements and what has come before now. We have shared incredible moments with everyone we work with and our audiences far and wide. From here, we are passionate about continuing to create fabulous theatrical experiences and breaking down barriers in our sector and beyond. Our actors are the inspiration and the beating heart of Lung Ha Theatre Company.*

Lung Ha actor Fern Brodie said: *I see Lung Ha and the other actors as my other family. I feel safe and happy when I spend time with them.*

Lung Ha actor Gavin Yule said: *Lung Ha is a place where I can perform and practise acting skills and develop new ones. It's also where I can make friends and have a social outlet. It also allows me to experience professional theatre and perform incredible pieces of work.*

Theatre critic Neil Cooper said: *Its first show, Lung Ha's Monkey, gave the company both its name and an identity that seemed to suggest that monkeying around on stage was a good thing. In the forty years since, that sense of liberation through play has remained at the company's core throughout work by a stream of writers and directors who followed in Vallis and Clerke's footsteps.*

With current Lung Ha Artistic Director Maria Oller at the helm for the last fifteen years, the company's radical philosophy has put it at the centre, not just of community-based arts initiatives, but of Scotland's entire theatre ecology. Watching the company grow into itself over these years has been a joy. Long may Lung Ha continue to thrive.

More quotes can be accessed [here](#).