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International working: Hofesh Shechter and other Arts Council funded organisations and artists share their talent on the world stage

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Taming of the Shrew, Propeller Theatre, Photo: Philip Tull

The South East's most exciting artists are becoming UK's biggest cultural exports - thanks to Arts Council funding - creating a new wave of Creative Britain. These artists and organisations are demonstrating that it's never been a more vital moment to continue funding Britain's cultural sector and artists, who form a vital part of our economic success and cultural diplomacy, showing the best of what the UK has to offer.

This October, **Hofesh Shechter Company**, an Arts Council England National portfolio organisation, set off on a North American tour of their electrifying 2010 dance piece *Political Mother*. Their first performance at renowned Brooklyn Academy of Music was met by standing ovations from audiences, and their two-month tour continued across Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa and Minneapolis.

Inventive, all-male Shakespeare company and Arts Council England National portfolio organisation, **Propeller Theatre Company**, has embarked on a national and international tour of *Twelfth Night* and *The Taming Of The Shrew* this November. Their latest shows have seen them perform in France, Italy and several other UK regional venues with further shows next year until August 2013 in Ann Arbor and Minneapolis, USA, and Milan.

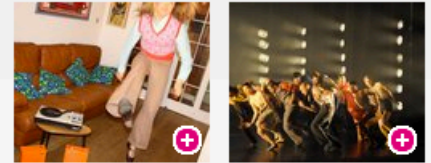
In February 2013, **caravan**, a **Farnham Maltings**' initiative which has been supported for years through Arts Council England's National Lottery funded **Grants for the arts scheme**, will be taking three performance artists to Vancouver in partnership with the city's **PUSH festival**: Action Hero and Dan Canham from Bristol, and Brighton-based **Victoria Melody** - all three frequently supported through the Grants for the arts scheme too.

In April 2013 **Jasmin Vardimon** will take new work *Freedom*, to Montclair's Peak Performances, New Jersey (18-21 April 2013) for their debut American performance.

2013 will also see international tours from integrated dance company **Stop Gap**, and interactive performance group **Blast Theory**, both regularly funded through Arts Council England National portfolio.

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'We want the experience to be about cultural diplomacy'

Clearly, it's never been a better time for creative genius and great art, as evidenced by our talented South East artists.

While the Arts Council provides the arts sector a stable funding environment and strategic development to nurture great talent, we're seeing increasing evidence that artists and organisations are acting as cultural diplomats across the world, not just commodities.

We talked to Gavin Stride, Director of Farnham Maltings and caravan, about how artists can make an impact internationally and why international working makes a difference.

Gavin explains: 'In January we've been invited to present three companies at the PuSh festival in Vancouver. But we didn't want to just show the work and go, the value is in the relationships and understandings that come from working around the world. So each company is going for an extended period. They're being twinned with companies in Canada and will start work on a new project. They'll also be running workshops, performing and talking about their work. The hope is that they'll become at home there and begin to feel like local artists.'

'We run a programme of workshops for artists interested in working internationally - and there's a real appetite. We've run workshops in Brighton, Bristol, Manchester and all have been oversubscribed, more are planned next year in London, Warwick and Newcastle. The surprise is that by encouraging companies to think internationally they often come to understand the work they make better within a UK context.'

'It is only when we understand our work in its place in the world that we can really talk about quality and value. For some years I have been visiting Iran and on one of those visits I found myself talking to the envoy who confided 'keep working, no matter how hard it gets - because there will come a time when we are looking to repair our relationships and understand rather than fight. And it is our artists who will do that'. Cultural diplomacy has never been more important.'

'The investment from Arts Council has been very important for the development of my career'

The Arts Council's on-going support for individual artists is critical and helps them progress in exciting ways that we cannot predict.

For instance, installation/site-specific artist **Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva** has recently been selected by the Ministry of Culture in Macedonia to represent Macedonia at the 55th International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia, where she will have her first solo show at the Biennale.

The Macedonian-born artist, who makes her home in Brighton, has created several works over the past seven years, supported through Arts Council's Grants for the arts funding. Elpida is making new work for the exhibition in Venice next summer, working with curator Ana Frangovska and the National Gallery of Macedonia.

Elpida says: 'Being selected to represent your country at the Venice Biennale is a huge privilege, and I'm so very proud. Showing in such a high profile international context to visual arts professionals from around the world is critical to my practice. It brings important critical validation, enhances my profile and introduces my work to an international audience.'

'The investment from Arts Council has been very important for the development of my career - in particular a 'Year of the Artist' grant in 2000 and a small development grant in 2009 and of course funding ArtSway's New Forest Pavilion, where I first had an opportunity to exhibit in Venice in 2005, so I'm really excited to be going back to present a solo exhibition.'

International working and partnerships are a rich vein for UK organisations to promote British talent overseas - and bring new work and influences here.

Pallant House Galley, a visual arts National portfolio organisations in Chichester, is currently working with the National Museum of Silesia in Poland and the K.H.Renlund Museum, Provincial Museum Central Ostrobothnia in Kokkola, Finland, on a joint touring project that will explore and display Outsider Art Environments from the three countries called 'Around'.

Marc Steene, Head of Learning and Community and Deputy Director at Pallant House says: 'This is a pilot of a larger project called 'The Impact of European Self-Taught Art'. It's the start of a growing initiative to forge further European links and organise a wider platform and opportunity to display art by non-traditional artists across Europe. If we're successful with our EU funding, we'll be touring in 2013.'