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**#SaveBruiser**

**PLEASE INSERT NAME**  is shocked and deeply disappointed to learn that Bruiser Theatre Company will not be included in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland’s 2018/19 Annual Funding Programme. Without this crucial funding, it will be impossible for Bruiser to deliver the innovative and meaningful work that, over the past 20 years, has allowed them to develop a diverse audience and terrific reputation across the island of Ireland. Indeed, Bruiser’s capacity to operate has been placed in grave jeopardy.

As a professional local actor I am frustrated at the decision made by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to cut Bruiser’s funding. Bruiser is a leading professional theatre company, creating job opportunities for local actors and creatives for over 20 years. Bruiser has one of the highest employment statistics within the sector, offering up to 100 freelance artistic contracts this past year. They audition extensively and openly, promoting fairness and transparency, and providing mentoring for less established actors. Their cyclical Arts Academy projects have helped promote professional development in the arts for Young People. They are a lynchpin in the structure and fabric of the Arts in Northern Ireland. Without them, many actors will be out of work, leading to the dreaded “brain drain” here in the province, forcing actors like myself to leave our city and source work elsewhere. How can we as a sector create and nurture homegrown talent when the funding is not being made available to our leading companies? How can we boost economic growth and tourism whilst cutting a company that brings so much reward to our city?

I cannot understand why Bruiser Theatre Company has been obliterated instantly, while their annual programme remains artistically outstanding and a flagship for the arts in Belfast. Bruiser is vital to the arts sector of Northern Ireland. I implore you to reinstate their funding, so Bruiser can continue to inspire future generations of young actors and audiences alike.

Cutting a company who are devoted to making theatre available to all is extremely dangerous. Bruiser also tours full cast productions throughout the province and into the Republic of Ireland from their base in Belfast. They remain one of the only theatre companies in Northern Ireland to do so. In addition, they are the only Northern Ireland theatre company to be included on GCSE and A Level Drama syllabuses, providing a vital resource for educators and students to embark upon their own creative journey through study of the Bruiser trademark physical style. By wiping out Bruiser Theatre Company, the damage to students and their educators will be devastating.

Bruiser produce high quality theatre experiences that excite, stimulate, and inspire. From the slapstick success of *The 39 Steps,* to the musical madness of *Cabaret*, and their truly innovative approach to *The Importance of Being Earnest,* they make West-End quality shows right here in Belfast; they help make it the incredible place it is today. Their current show, *The Colleen Bawn*, now playing at the Lyric Theatre, is a prime example of their commitment to artistic excellence *and* theatre that entertains.

Over the last four years, arts funding in Northern Ireland has been slashed to a bare minimum. While I do not feel that the Arts Council made the correct decision regarding Bruiser’s funding, we acknowledge that the agency has a limited and ever decreasing budget, some of which is newly ringfenced. It is, in fact, the repeated paring down of Government support for the arts that has rendered Bruiser a casualty. At a time when Northern Ireland is perceived externally as a hot bed of creative potential, and high-profile productions are bringing inward investment and increased potential for national and international tourism, it beggars belief that support for the arts is continually deprioritised.

Over the past year almost 20,000 people have had a taste of the Bruiser experience - I believe that these and many other people in Northern Ireland understand the significance of Bruiser’s work and, importantly, the huge boost to arts funding that must occur if companies such as them are to survive and thrive.

The profound legacy of Bruiser’s relevance cannot be understated. I ask you now to listen, value and invest in the arts to #SaveBruiser.

**Signed:**