

Access Report Bicycle Boy

About the Show

Bicycle Boy is an interactive eco musical for children 6 – 11 and their families. The show explores themes of community, sustainable living, inter-generational relationships - and is, ultimately, a celebration of cycling: the freedom a bicycle gives you. For many 8 year olds its their first rush of independence. We all remember our first bike. Inspired by bike-powered generator technology, the plot hinges on the audience's willingness to hop on a bike and pedal.

Sam has 24 hours to clear out his granddad's old bike workshop. He remembers granddad teaching him to ride and pretending to be his favourite superhero, Bicycle Boy. Sam's reminiscences lead to a clue that granddad may have left Sam a present somewhere in the workshop, and some hints about how to find it. But there's no power and Sam needs electricity to unlock the clues. With the help of the audience, he needs to work out how to connect bikes to generators and peddle like mad to power gramophones, lights, fans and electric guitars to solve the mystery and find a gift that's been waiting for him for 20 years.



Learning Summary

Barriers

The most important first step to putting together our access plan was to identify the barriers to access that some audiences may face. To identify these barriers, we consulted with the Greenwich and Docklands International Festival's Access and Community Engagement Manager, Cinque Ports Mobility, London Recumbents and Wheels for Wellbeing. Through that process, we identified the following barriers:

- Some audience members may face barriers to pedaling due to leg strength or function.
- Some audience members may face barriers to pedaling due to balance
- Some audience members may not be able to hear the dialogue and songs.

Steps Taken

To remove the barriers to pedaling, we purchased two cycles that are designed to make cycling more accessible: a recumbent hand-cycle sized for adults and a children's recumbent cycle. We identified which pieces of equipment to acquire based on our consultations with accessible cycling groups. The hand-cycle reduces barriers to pedaling for those who may face barriers to pedaling with their legs. Instead, the cyclist uses their arms for power. While the hand-cycle was fitted for adults, during the show, it can be used by ages of participant, including very young children with assistance from an adult. The child sized recumbent cycle is designed to be pedaled with the legs, but provides increased accessibility for people who may struggle with balance when riding an upright bike.

With the support of the presenting festivals, we were able to offer BSL interpretation



of select performances at three festivals during the tour. This involved sending the script to the festivals in advance for the BSL interpreters to read and accommodating them within the playing space.

Challenges

We faced challenges integrating the new equipment into our existing bike powered generator setup. Except for the generators themselves, which are custom built, the rest of the gear we use – the stands and dynamos – are adapted technology. The stands are originally designed to convert an upright bike to a home exercise machine using resistance. To modify the bikes to generate power, we've replaced the resistance pieces with small motors, or dynamos. Our existing stands require a minimum wheel circumference and width to fit into the stand and reach the dynamo.

Both recumbent cycles required modification to integrate into our existing system. For the hand cycle, this was a relatively minor adjustment to the width of the front wheel by adding additional nuts as spacers. For the recumbent cycle, this meant purchasing a different type of stand that could accommodate a much narrower wheel and heavily modifying the stand and dynamo so that the much smaller 16" front wheel could power the dynamo.

Additionally, while our equipment addressed the needs of many people who face barriers to pedaling an upright bike, we did not encounter equipment that would allow someone whose ability prevents pedaling with both feet and hands. In our research, we didn't find a piece of equipment that could remove all barriers that



didn't require its own power source. This gear is also currently out of our budget range as it is highly specialised.



The biggest challenge we faced through the whole process was reaching the audience for whom our access equipment was most meaningful. We took steps to inform each of our presenting festivals that we had access equipment available, and we reached out to local accessible cycling communities on social media to get the word out, but we didn't have the time and manpower to create the strong ties that are often necessary to engage a specific community in a show. However, the access equipment was always used during the show, often by able bodied children, and its presence created opportunities for conversation and learning. We also, by leaving the equipment set up between performances, had a lot of conversations with passers by and festival goers who came over to ask questions about the 'unusual' bikes and find out more.

Lessons

The most important lesson we took away from increasing accessibility for *Bicycle Boy* is that the presence of accessibility equipment is a catalyst for a valuable conversation. Many of the people who face barriers to pedaling an upright bicycle we met between shows. They saw the recumbent hand cycle from across a park or field and came to investigate. On several occasions through our summer tour, we found ourselves in conversations between shows with people who wanted to try out the hand cycle either because they were considering purchasing one or because the equipment was new to them. These conversations may have been the way we made the most impact with our accessibility equipment.

We also learned that people who face barriers to pedaling may also require more time and assistance to get onto and off of equipment during the performance. While we can accommodate that time, it sometimes meant that audience members were too shy to volunteer during the performance. Because we set aside time at the end for the audience to ride the bikes, they were able to participate in a less pressured setting. For the future, we will engage in additional performer and crew training about how to properly engage patrons who face pedaling barriers during the show.

