Department for Communities
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**#SaveBruiser**

**ORGANISATION**  is very surprised 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.

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.

Devoted to making theatre available to all, Bruiser also tours full cast productions throughout the province and into the Republic of Ireland from our 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 their trademark physical style.

Bruiser has shown consistent dedication to nurturing the next generation of theatre professionals, not least through their annual youth programmes *A Day With Bruiser* and *The Arts Academy*. These comprehensive courses, focussed on professional development, have launched the careers of scores of young actors, fostering relationships and helping them break into a famously challenging industry.

Bruiser Theatre Company are an essential part of sustaining Northern Ireland’s arts economy. Their shows bring people into the city, and their audiences are an essential customer base to our business. As well as providing over 100 artistic contracts a year for actors, designers, and facilitators, their activity stimulates Belfast’s blossoming night-time economy, in turn enhancing consumer spend, and sustaining many industries, not least the hospitality trade. Their contribution to sustaining the life of our industry is deeply significant, and news of their funding crisis is a blow to us all.

Over the last four years, arts funding in Northern Ireland has been slashed to a bare minimum. While we 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 - we 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. We ask you now to listen to us and to value and invest in the arts to #SaveBruiser.

**Signed:**