



## Press Release

Wednesday 31 March 2021

### Ellie Griffiths receives Assitej International award for artistic excellence

Ellie Griffiths Artistic Director and joint CEO of Oily Cart, has become the first UK artist to receive the ASSITEJ International Award for Artistic Excellence. It is given to celebrate outstanding achievements and contributions to theatre for young audiences locally, regionally and globally during the last three years.



The award is presented during the Assitej World Congress with a prize of \$5,000 and is the most prestigious award given by the organization. This award is given to an individual or to a company working in the field of theatre for children and young people, nominated by either their national ASSITEJ centre or professional network.

The award recognises emerging artists and innovation and was created by the late Dr. Nat Eek, Honorary President and former ASSITEJ World President (1972-75) in memory of his wife, Patricia Fulton Eek.

The award is shared with [Dalija Acin Thelander](#), a Serbian choreographer working in Sweden who makes sensory theatre work mainly for babies. Ellie Griffiths is mentoring Dalija this year to make her first show for disabled children. This is in collaboration with the Swedish Opera house in Stockholm and premieres in Spring 2022.

Speaking about her Artistic Achievement Award for the 20th ASSITEJ World Congress, **Ellie Griffiths Said:** “I am delighted and overwhelmed to receive this award and would like to whole-heartedly thank the Assitej Committee. Making this work is the greatest honour of my life. It is infinitely challenging and infinitely inspiring. I am indebted to the

founders of Oily Cart and the young disabled artists we collaborate with, who continually make us dig deeper, get more creative, and rip up the rule book to find new possibilities of what theatre can be.

I am particularly excited that this year, the award for Artistic Excellence has been given to two artists working in a sensory way. It is about time that sensory theatre was recognised as a way of making ambitious, high-quality theatre that doesn't exclude anyone, rather than being seen as a specialism on the fringes. By thinking beyond words, we can shift the power dynamics and level the playing field in cultural spaces. Far from being specialist, sensory work connects us to the source of our humanity. Most of our most treasured, emotive moments are sensory ones.

What I have always loved about this work is how it invites everyone and is fearless of difference. Every response to our shows is celebrated as equal and valid, breaking away from all the set conventions imposed around going to the theatre.

I believe that sensory work is the closest we can get to a universal theatre language, which feels more vital than ever at a time of deep divisions and polarised perspectives. What's exciting is that we are just at the tip of the iceberg in terms of its potential.”

**Excerpt of Oily Cart statement to mark one year of living through Covid-19:** “March 23rd marked a year of no touch. Not only is touch the centre-point of Oily Cart’s work, but for many who face multiple barriers to access, it is the main channel of communication. Touch is the only sense that humans can’t live without. So we celebrate a year of finding new ways to connect and hold each other. For Oily Cart that has meant performing personalised songs on doorsteps and online, creating packages for individual family members with craft and care, and working with new sound technologies to create intimacy from a distance.”

## **On Tour NOW: Space To Be**

Oily Cart sends their new show [Space to Be](#) direct into homes. Families open up a series of packages over the course of a week to experience the show. The story unfolds through specially designed objects in each box, inspiring sensory experiences in sound, light and touch. Space to Be is on tour from March to August 2021.

**ENDS**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

**PR representative:** For interviews and further information please contact: Binita Walia on 07734 507799 [binita@thespaceinbetween.co.uk](mailto:binita@thespaceinbetween.co.uk)

Oily Cart Covid-19 Statement: <https://oilycart.org.uk/resources/one-year-on/>

### **Links:**

Space To Be Press release [Link](#).

Covid Statement in full [LINK](#)

Assitej International achievement awards: [LINK](#)

## **About Ellie Griffiths: Artistic Director & Joint CEO**

Ellie began as a performer for Oily Cart (2011-16), before becoming an Associate Artist and guest Director. She founded the Upfront Performance Network (which connects 900 international sensory theatre makers) in 2016, and was awarded a Winston Churchill Travel Fellowship, to research sensory theatre across the world. Ellie's artistic work and training has been produced and delivered internationally in countries such as Japan, Sweden and the USA. In 2019, Ellie created Sound Symphony, a performance made for and with Autistic young people. This was programmed as part of the Made in Scotland showcase, Bibu festival (Sweden) and in the Edinburgh International Children's Festival. Ellie was recently awarded the Assitej International Award for Artistic Excellence.

## **About Assitej:**

ASSITEJ unites theatres, organisations and individuals throughout the world who make theatre for children and young people. ASSITEJ is dedicated to the artistic, cultural and educational rights of children and young people across the globe and advocates on behalf of all children regardless of nationality, cultural identity, ability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion. ASSITEJ brings people together so that they can share knowledge and practice within the field of theatre for children and young people in order to deepen understandings, develop practice, create new opportunities and strengthen the global sector. The members of ASSITEJ are national centres, professional networks, and individuals from around 100 countries across the world.

<http://www.assitej-international.org/en/>

**About Oily Cart** Since 1981 Oily Cart has been taking its pioneering form of sensory theatre to children and young people in arts venues across the UK. Challenging accepted definitions of theatre and audience, they create innovative, multi-sensory and highly interactive productions for all children and young people, centering those labelled as having complex needs.

Using hydro-therapy pools and trampolines, live music and sound design, aromatherapy, projection, and puppetry together with a vast array of sensory techniques, Oily Cart creates original and highly inclusive theatre for all young audiences.

[www.oilycart.org.uk](http://www.oilycart.org.uk)

Registered in England & Wales No 2535040    Registered Charity No 1000799

Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

With thanks to the following organisations for their generous support:

BBC Children in Need, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Goldsmiths' Company Charity, The Hedley Foundation, The Leathersellers' Company Charitable Fund, The Sobell Foundation, Taurus Foundation, Wandsworth Council

**Editors Notes ENDS.**