



Cambridge Arts
Theatre

Interview data sheet: Behind the Scenes Project

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Interviewee's surname: Collins

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's forename(s): Kat

Gender: Female

Occupation: Head of Sales and Marketing

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None

Abstract:

Current Head of Sales and Marketing, Kat Collins, reflects on her career at the Theatre. Moving from Box Office to work in marketing her career has been unified by an interest in audiences. She shares memories of some of the Theatre's regular patrons and celebrates the diversity of Cambridge Arts Theatre's audience. Kat explains the importance of the annual pantomime to the Theatre. Finally, she shares her excitement

	when the Theatre produces its own work and anticipates the potential for more of this in the Theatre's future.
Key words:	Pantomime, marketing, box office, audience, 2000s, 2010s, producing, David Haig, Sir Ian McKellen, Knee High Productions
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00.00	Kat summarises her career. She began working in the Theatre's box office in 2008. She reflects on the challenges and benefits of working in a customer facing role. She remembers the skill needed to juggle the different aspects of the job and that it could be overwhelming, especially when she first started.
05.08	Kat describes her current role as Head of Sales and Marketing. She sees the connection between all the different roles she has done at the Theatre is understanding the audience and the way they interact with the Theatre. Among her proudest moments were overseeing two ticketing system implementations, most recently in 2017. She enjoyed the project management aspects of this work.
08.03	Kat remembers some of her favourite productions at the Theatre, <i>Mary Stuart</i> , <i>Brief Encounter</i> by Knee High Productions, as well as the annual pantomime. Kat speaks about the privilege of getting to meet and work with some amazing people, memorably David Haig who wrote and starred in <i>Pressure</i> and Sir Ian McKellen. Kat explains that as part of her role in marketing she often has to accompany actors to press interviews. She thinks press and PR is a difficult job – she explains that at the Theatre they see it as a part of a wider marketing effort, acting as a middleman between the actor and production company and the media outlet. She comments, you are often not completely in control of the situation!
12.24	Kat's favourite part of working at the theatre is customer interaction, communicating with customers and audience development. She loves working somewhere where people come to have fun and where there are a loyal group of regular theatregoers. Kat reflects on the personal details that audience members will share with front line staff. She remembers one couple who used to come to the Theatre regularly, when one partner died, the remaining partner continued to come to the Theatre and request the same seats she had sat in with her husband. Continuing to come to the Theatre was a way of remembering and honouring their partner
15.58	Kat remembers some interesting audience members. One lady attended the Theatre's Thursday matinee in stunning array of fur coats and staff wondered what their back story was! The range of audience members keeps working at the Theatre exciting.
17.21	Kat thinks seeing an audience really engage with a show is a really wonderful part of the job. Part of the power of the

	Theatre, as well as its history, is the ability to create a shared experience. Kat enjoys speaking with colleagues after seeing a show and the fact that they often all have different opinions.
18.33	Kat still enjoys going to the theatre in her free time, although she thinks since working at the Arts Theatre she is much more analytical about what she sees. She discusses her favourite production, <i>Brief Encounter</i> [2009].
21.18	Kat speaks about her favourite genres of theatre, thrillers and cheesy musicals. Growing up in Cambridge, Kat came to the Theatre long before she worked here – she was interested in drama at school, watching live theatre as part of her GCSE. She never imagined she'd work here. However, she always wanted to work in the arts or in the creative industries.
25.03	Kat reflects on some of the times her job has been difficult. Installing the new ticketing systems were very tiring – but it was time limited. When the Theatre funded a Masters degree, it was a brilliant opportunity, but she did it alongside working full time and that was sometimes difficult.
27.37	Kat celebrates pantomime's 'brilliant audience' – kids coming for their first ever trip to the theatre and to older members who have come every year. Lots of school groups. It is a season at the Theatre that is both busy and rewarding. Often audiences come to celebrate something. The Theatre produces the production itself; this gives everyone who works at the Theatre a sense of investment in the show. The show is often very high quality.
29.48	The marketing team check visits by local school groups run smoothly. Kat's favourite groups are school groups. She remembers in 2015 helping with a performance for school group – she nipped into the Theatre before the 'transformation scene' [when Cinderella transforms from her ragged clothes to the ball gown]. Working in the Theatre she knew the trick, but none of the visiting schools did, the children were cheering and screaming. Kat was moved to tears. She explains the Theatre hope that children remember this experience and in ten or twenty years will come back and see another show.
33.23	As part of producing the pantomime, every year the Theatre has a read through – when the cast first comes together to read through this year's script. Kat explains that it makes you feel part of the pantomime family. Kat remembers one of the funny incident – the pantomime was Jack and the Beanstalk and the beanstalk was inflatable, unfortunately it did not inflate as it should, and Jack was left hanging in the air on wires unable to grasp hold of the beanstalk which was quite funny.
36.27	Kat reflects on some challenges that come with the pantomime. Certain actors can be friendlier or less demanding than others. Some shows are easier to sell. She cannot pick a

	favourite pantomime, but she did love the performance of Robin Hood which has a really strong script and nice cast. Every year has moments she loved.
40.27	Kay enjoys both returning shows – where she likes the play and seeing new work. Ultimately a diverse programme is very important. She explains the Theatre tries to have a balance between old favourites and new work. There are different audiences for them. Kat says one of the nicest things about working at the Theatre is the staff team. It is both small and busy and open and collaborative. The environment is supportive and friendly.
42.14	Asked to remember important moments for the Theatre, Kat notes that shows produced in house feel very special. It feels exciting as it is a growth area for the Theatre. Major projects are also exciting – the foyer development presented some practical difficulties but it offered real improvements for our audiences. Kat reflects that the structure of staffing has also changed a lot since 2010. Box office and front of house felt very separate from office staff, but there has been a real push to pull front of house staff and office staff together since then.
45.42	The typical profile of box office/ front of house staff in theatres can be transitory, often staffed by students, who are not always that engaged but the Theatre’s wider mission. It is not like that at Cambridge Arts Theatre.
47.27	Asked what she would like to change about the Theatre, Kat says she is excited for the Theatre to begin producing more work itself. She says the Theatre has produced excellent work and it has been well received. But it is a question of resource. It would be exciting to do more of that work.
50.12	ENDS