



**The Telling Trustees Recruitment
and Information Brief 2024**

ABOUT THE TELLING: A SUMMARY

The Telling attempts to **break new ground**, where **new writing** by **Artistic Director Clare Norburn** and **music collide**. We tour high-quality, accessible and affordable productions: combining engagements by leading promoters with self-promotions in places that are often missed out on touring circuits, including building audiences and partnerships in **Wolverhampton, South Cumbria, Conwy (North Wales), Bedford** and **Folkestone**.

THE ARTISTS WE WORK WITH

Our creative team is led by **Artistic Director Clare Norburn** (playwright, producer and soon-to-be-retired soprano) who won the **2023 Colin Skipp Memorial Radio Playwriting Competition** and was one of 7 writers, selected out of 400, for **BBC/ACE-funded The Space's Pitch Perfect** scheme to receive mentoring and be commissioned to develop a play with music for national BBC radio.

Our regular acclaimed director **Nicholas Renton** cut his teeth in theatre, going on to direct at the RSC and then spent 30 years directing for the BBC and ITV, including being **BAFTA-nominated** for BBC TV's *Mrs Gaskell's Wives and Daughters*. Our lighting designer is **Natalie Rowland**.

We work with a creative pool of:

- leading actors including **Alex Newman, Rachael Stirling, Danny Webb, Dominic Marsh, Clive Hayward, Karen Ascoe, Molly Lynch, Robin Soans, Gerald Kyd, Suzanne Ahmet, Teresa Banham, Leila Mimmack** and **Niall Ashdown**
- acclaimed musicians, many who are early music specialists, including **Emily Baines, Jean Kelly, Jamie Akers, Clemmie Franks, Heloise Bernard, Giles Lewin, Alison Kinder, Avital Raz**



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS & HOW WE WORK

In 2024, The Telling won the prestigious **Audience Participation of the Year Award** organised by the European Early Music organisation, **REMA** for our ***Songs and Stories*** project in partnership with animateur **Sarah Atter** and **Wolverhampton Refugee and Migrant Centre**. In 2022, The Telling was shortlisted for two other REMA Awards.

We tour **an average of 30 performances per year** with tours mostly made up of intense bursts of 4-12 performances, underpinned by never more than 2 weeks of rehearsal.

We have performed for a **range of venues and promoters** including, Buxton International Music Festival, Music at Oxford, Anvil Arts, Lake District Summer Music, Newbury Spring Festival, Beverley Early Music Festival, Brighton Early Music Festival, Arena Theatre (Wolverhampton), Conwy Classical Music Festival, Stoke Newington Early Music Festival, Little Missenden Festival, Keele Concerts Society, Bedford Music Club, Music in the Village (Walthamstow), Stranraer Music For All and New Vic Theatre. We usually tour for one night but in 2024, we are performing our first week-run at OSO Arts Centre, Barnes, with follow up runs planned there for 2025.

However, alongside these paid engagements, we are also **unusual** in the way that we **fundraise to take performances to places which “miss out”** in accessing touring circuits: so our tours are a **mixed economy** of **guaranteed fees, box office splits** and **self-promotions**, backed by reciprocal marketing partners on the ground.

OUR DISTINCTIVE COLLISION OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

The hallmark of our work is our distinctive collision of music and drama. Our early programmes started with early music and drama but we are increasingly moving away from that limitation, whilst keeping our early music repertoire still in our repertoire.

The Telling's programmes are written by Clare Norburn whose latter work takes inspiration from **Brecht**, often tearing down the fourth wall, and iconoclastic TV playwright, **Dennis Potter**, exploring the nexus between memory and the characters' inner or fantasy lives, and harnessing music's unique capacity to trigger memories and feelings. Several are **political** or provide **commentary on current issues seen through the lens of the past**. For example:

- celebrity culture and #MeToo are explored in ***What the Dickens?***
- ***Into the Melting Pot*** focuses on religious and cultural intolerance and the plight of refugees

“Clare Norburn takes moments in history to make us understand the present more clearly”

Robin Soans, playwright

View a list of The Telling projects here: www.thetelling.co.uk/programmes

Many of our projects are revived. For example, *Into the Melting Pot* has been revived each year since its premiere in 2017.

Our most recent show, *What the Dickens?* (2023, and being revived in Nov/Dec 2024) is our most ambitious, with all seven performers singing and acting, plus most also play instruments. It reimagines Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and is the show with the greatest commercial possibilities.

PLOT: It is Charles Dickens' last Christmas Eve: 1869. Against his doctor's wishes, he gives one of his acclaimed theatrical readings of *A Christmas Carol*, but from the moment the lights go down, his life becomes strangely entangled with Scrooge. Dickens' carefully managed image as a family man, who has created the very quintessence of Christmas, starts to unravel as he is "haunted" by his wife and mother of his ten children, Catherine Dickens and his secret young mistress, Ellen 'Nelly' Ternan. The "ghosts" force him to face his past, present and future. Can Dickens learn from them, repent - and be saved, as Scrooge was saved?

Composer **Steven Edis** (who regularly worked with **Trevor Nunn** including at **The National Theatre** in the 1990s) uses a mix of newly composed and arranged music to soundtrack the drama: he reimagines colourful Victorian popular songs, street music and carols, many of which we know Dickens played on the accordion and sang himself.



What the Dickens? - Hove (2023)

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The Telling led the way in delivering online workshops during the pandemic as well as singing and playing public workshops, sometimes enabling participants to join us on stage at some point during the evening.

"I found myself in tears as I realised it was the first time in many years I'd actually been able to sing a carol" Online Singing Workshop participant

While on tour, we capitalise on bringing high-quality artists to excluded communities around the country by offering music workshops to local schools ahead of the evening performances.

Since 2023, we have worked with amateur **Sarah Atter** in developing music education projects which take inspiration from our stage works and through which school students are facilitated to create their own song over three sessions and perform them to an audience.

Sarah also worked with us on our award-winning *Songs and Stories* project, which was delivered with **Wolverhampton Refugee and Migrant Centre** in January/February 2024 and **Manchester Jewish Museum** in May 2024. We have plans to take this project to Cardiff and Birmingham in 2025.

"It helped with reframing the mind and eventually it created hope and empowerment, and it helped with integration and building connections"

Staff feedback from the Wolverhampton Refugee and Migrant Centre

"I was in a state of depression before coming to the workshops, but after engaging with you in the stories and songs, I felt better."

Participant feedback from the Wolverhampton Refugee and Migrant Centre



Carol Primary School Workshop - Cumbria (2023)

OUR WORK ON FILM & RADIO

From 2020 to 2022, we made use of our director, Nicholas Renton's expertise as a TV director to film arthouse film adaptations of our **Empowered Women Trilogy** staged shows which received critical praise. Most notably, **Vision**, which follows the extraordinary medieval Abbess **Hildegard of Bingen** played by **Teresa Banham** (RSC/Shared Experience), was selected by **The Guardian's Tim Ashley** as one of the **Top 3 online summer music highlights alongside the Salzburg and Edinburgh Festivals**:

"Norburn and mezzo Ariane Prüssner are mesmerising in the music"

Tim Ashley, The Guardian on *Vision* (2020)

Also during lockdown, we created **Love in the Lockdown** (2021). Starring **Alec Newman** and **Rachael Stirling**, it is a distinctive online play with music, directed, rehearsed and filmed entirely over Zoom and on the performers' phones in their own homes. It attracted significant press interest and was reviewed favourably in comparison with BBC TV's **Staged** with David Tennant and Michael Sheen. It was **shortlisted in 6 categories for the SceneSaver Awards** at which Nicholas Renton won Best Director.

"an exploration of the boundaries between art & life ... intelligent ... does more than reflect overfamiliar pandemic situations back at us ... it finds new terrain"

Arifa Akbar, The Guardian on *Love in the Lockdown* (2021)

Clare was selected as one of seven writers out of 400 applicants – and the only one for radio, rather than TV – for BBC/ACE-funded **The Space's Pitch Perfect** scheme in 2022/23. As a result, she came close to having a play with music on BBC Radio 3. Also, having won the **2023 Colin Skipp Memorial Prize for Radio-playwriting**, pushing on doors to break into radio drama remains a future priority.

RECORDINGS

The Telling records for **First Hand Records**: our first CD **Gardens of Delight** was selected for **BBC Music Magazine's** playlist for April 2019 and our second CD **Secret Life of Carols** reached No 25 in the Classical Charts in December 2019. **David Mellor (Classic FM/Daily Mail)** called it his **"absolute favourite"** 2019 Christmas Album and it was in **The Guardian, BBC Music Magazine, The Daily Mail** and **Classic FM's** "Best Christmas Albums" lists.

"imaginative and eclectic"

Fiona Maddocks, The Guardian on *Secret Life of Carols* CD (2019)

Our most recent CD consists of the soundtracks of the **Vision** and **Unsung Heroine** concertplays, released in 2022 in memory of mezzo, Ariane Prüssner, and received a four-star review from **BBC Music Magazine**.

OUR STRUCTURE, BOARD AND MANAGEMENT

The Telling is a charitable incorporated organisation (registered charity no 1181802). We currently have 3 Trustees (**Catherine Edis**, **Joanne McIntosh** and **Elizabeth Davies**).

Our current Chair, **Catherine Edis** is looking to step down once we have recruited two more Trustees. **Elizabeth Davies** has agreed to be Interim Chair to oversee the recruitment process of two Trustees. Catherine, Joanne and Elizabeth have been Trustees since we became a charity in 2019.

The charity is overseen by:

- **Clare Norburn**, Artistic Director (who is also our playwright, producer and has been a singer, but is retiring from singing in December 2024 due to hearing loss challenges). Clare oversees strategic and artistic planning, budgeting, fundraising and partnerships. Clare works approx. 2 days a week for The Telling on a pro-bono basis. She is paid for singing, producing and writing projects. She earns her living mostly from freelance fundraising.
- **Stephanie Pillinger**, General Manager, has worked for The Telling since 2018, significantly increasing her skills each year. Steph oversees project management, logistics, marketing, press and works with Clare to support on fundraising and finances. She also attends most of the live shows. She works for The Telling 3 days a week. On the other 2 days, she works for Streetwise Opera as Trusts and Foundations Manager.

TURNOVER AND FUNDING MODEL

The Telling is growing: our income until 2022 was around £60-70K pa (excepting 2020 being lower – £40K – due to the pandemic and the natural reduction of touring), but 2022/23 saw a leap to £109K, with our 2023/24 accounts in the region of £150K and 2024/25 onwards showing incremental increases above £150K. We expect income to maintain in the region of £150-200K for the next few years. Our reserves as of 31st March 2023 were £11,089. Our accounts are on the Charity Commission website:

<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search/-/charity-details/5131418>

The model of our work is expensive and so, as well as the mixed economy of guaranteed fees from festivals and venues, box office splits and self-promotions, we rely heavily on fundraised income. ACE funding has proved hard to come by since the pandemic with The Telling receiving only one project grant since a Covid Emergency grant in April 2020. We currently have a pending application and have plans to put in two more in the next 6 months. The main source of income is one-off appeals but particularly from trusts and foundations because, for a small arts organisation, we have particular skills in fundraising from trusts; page 7 of our 2022/23 report shows £47K of trust and foundation income. The majority are small grants of £1000- £5000.

We are currently starting to exploit potential opportunities, working towards an innovative model, which Clare Norburn has trialled in another organisation, working with partner artistic collaborators (**CarmenCo** on **Creating Carmen** and young vocal ensemble **The Mancunium Consort** on **Breaking the Rules**) and helping them fundraise. This means that in some cases, the partner can front the applications. This has the double benefit that these two partner organisations can learn from our expertise, make connections with new funders and learn how to write applications, whilst also enabling The Telling to benefit from grants from trusts we could not approach, due to many of them asking for one, two or three-year gaps before you can reapply.

THE ROLE OF THE TRUSTEES

The Telling seeks **two new Trustees**, who will use their skills and experience to help the organisation navigate the next phase of its development.

Trustees examine, challenge and support the operational delivery and strategic direction of the charity's activities. They also bring an independent perspective to the work of The Telling, with specific subject matter expertise.

The Board of Trustees is principally accountable to the Charity Commission and donors and ensures that the activities of the charitable company meet public benefit requirements. It currently includes three members with a range of backgrounds and experiences. The Board actively engages with the Artistic Director and General Manager on governance matters and in sharing decisions. The broad areas of the work of the Board includes:

- **Strategic direction:** ensuring that the charity is responding to the changing external environment across programme areas
- **Performance:** monitoring the performance of the executive against strategic and operational plans
- **Assurance:** contributing to the identification and monitoring of risk; ensuring there are adequate short and longer-term financial plans in place to deliver strategy; monitoring adherence to the highest standards of charity governance including all requisite policies.

Moving from “Year Ahead” to 3-year planning

We currently tend to plan one year to 18 months ahead but need support towards a first 3-year Business plan, setting out the next phase of our work as we move from a music ensemble that combines with theatre to a theatre organisation that uses music to tell stories. We need to clarify our ambitions and act on and revisit thoughts about our strategic direction from an Away Day in Spring 2022.

The areas of expertise we are seeking to support the next phase of The Telling's ambitions are:

- Producing theatre productions
- Fundraising, particularly from philanthropists and trusts
- Marketing, PR and press
- Broadcasting
- Business Planning

Charity trustees are unpaid. However, we believe that this role can secure non-financial rewards, including getting close to The Telling's exciting and distinctive artistic process, contributing to the arts and wider charitable sector, providing post-holders with opportunities to grow and develop their own leadership and career aspirations, broadening personal outlooks and experience, and enhancing confidence as a board and committee member.

The Telling is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone can thrive. We value and appreciate new ideas and perspectives that may help to bring the exciting world of contemporary music to a wider audience. As an organisation that exists to shape, reflect and respond to the society in which we live, we want our organisation to be representative of the communities where we work, encompassing a wide range of different backgrounds and experiences. We would therefore encourage applications from those beyond the music or creative arts sector to broaden our expertise, although we also do seek one Trustee with experience or a route to understanding theatre producing and with contacts in that world.

It is not necessary to have previous board or committee experience, although applicants should have regard to the role description. Where learning or development support may be required, this can be highlighted in the application process.

Time commitment

Board meetings are held in person at least four times a year, normally between 7pm and 9pm in London, with papers being provided by e-mail ahead of each meeting. One of these will include a short meeting for the AGM and to approve the Annual Report and Accounts.

Minimal additional time will be required for reading papers and preparing for meetings, advisory meetings and calls on an ad hoc basis. We would also encourage Trustees to attend performances by The Telling and to get to know our artists and work. The outlined time commitment above is a minimum and of course, we welcome candidates who can offer more; however we aim to be flexible to accommodate individuals' other commitments.

How to apply

To be considered for these positions, please submit your Curriculum Vitae and supporting letter, addressed to Clare Norburn, Artistic Director at clare@thetelling.co.uk by **5pm on Sunday 1st December**.

Your letter should explain why you wish to join us and how you feel your contribution would be of value to The Telling and should be no longer than two sides of A4 paper.

The receipt of all applications will be acknowledged. Those shortlisted will be invited to meet Clare Norburn and the Trustees online on a mutually convenient date. Please indicate any holiday periods or non-availability within your application.

Other information

Further details on the work we do can be found on our website: www.thetelling.co.uk. A full list of Trustees and our recent annual reports can be found on the Charity Commission website.