

**PROJECT REPORT** December 2022 *electronic only*

**BETTY BLUE EYES in HMP BRONZEFIELD: Sep - Nov 2022**

from Wasfi Kani CBE, Founder / CEO Pimlico Opera

Thank you very much for your contribution to the project. A programme was posted in November. If you would like more copies please do say.

The project made a small loss, facing all the post-COVID problems of most theatre companies: raising funds, increased costs (both people and goods) and disappointing ticket sales.

The previous prison project had been in March 2020, just before the first lockdown.

Bronzefield prison is the biggest women's prison in Europe with a roll call of 572. A women's prison holds a wider range of prisoners than a male institution. Many have had their children taken into care. Ian Whiteside, ex-no 1 Governor, has worked in prisons for more than 25 years. *"The partnership with Pimlico Opera cannot be underestimated. It is the single most positive project within a prison I have ever been involved with."* He invited us to return in 2021 but there was a new lockdown Jan – Mar 2021 and the project was postponed to early 2022. With high levels of winter COVID, the project was further delayed to autumn 2022.

We must explain the change from **Little Shop of Horrors** to **Betty Blue Eyes**.

Bronzefield is run by Sodexo with "embedded" representatives of HM Prison Service who act as "go-betweens". Back in August 2021 HM Prison Service approved *Little Shop of Horrors*, a comedy about a man-eating plant.

Liz Truss came to power on 5 Sep 2022 and two weeks later, the prison was told by HM Prison Service that the title of the show was too contentious and the piece would have to be changed. The prison governor suggested a different title be used (for example, *The Carnivorous Plant*), but to no avail.

Thus, the prisoners and professionals started rehearsing *Little Shop* and two weeks later were rehearsing *Betty*.

**Mon 26 Sep** *Little Shop* rehearsals commence for inmates (The set had been built).

**Mon 3 Oct** Professional cast playing principal roles join.

**Tue 4 Oct** We are told to find a new show. The rights-holders of *Betty Blue Eyes* prioritised our application and HM Prison Service "approved" it. Professionals and prisoners began work immediately. This new show required the set to be adapted, costumes redesigned, lighting design revised, and different orchestral players. *Betty* had very different wig / hair requirements and an inmate took charge of the "department" researching 1940 hair styles and practising in the prison salon. This individual is hoping to work in a theatre wig department on her release next year.

**Tue 11 Oct** It was announced that the vetting procedure for people working in

prisons would change with immediate effect. Thus, though the principals had been vetted in August, only the creative team, one professional and the Assistant Stage Manager had received full confirmation. The other cast and two stage managers were escorted out of the prison, alongside many prison maintenance staff in the same situation.

The governor was totally supportive of Pimlico Opera, but had to comply with the new regulations. The creative team continued to work with inmates but this became harder with the professionals missing.

**Mon 24 Oct** Principals were allowed into the prison with only 10 days to opening night.

(Liz Truss served as PM from 5 September 2022 – 24 October 2022).

### THE PROJECT

Pimlico Opera's annual prison project is well-known and has taken 60,000 + public into prisons. This work began in 1989.

There were seven performances of *Betty* and roughly 2,000 people saw the show. This included 76 members of prisoners' families, prison staff and their families. This attendance figure is lower than past projects.

Prison staff, the prisoners and the public all deemed the project a success. The project was run by Helen Sennett, Director of Operations, who has worked on fifteen prison projects. She worked with prison staff to take 300 public into and out of prison each night.

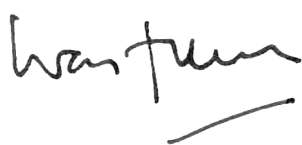
The project budget vs actual is given here.

The project

- changes the prisoners who find things inside themselves they didn't know existed
- changes the audience
- changes the prison.

Once again, thank you for your support. If there is further detail you require, we would be pleased to provide it.

With all good wishes



Wasfi Kani CBE  
Founder / CEO, Pimlico Opera

<b>BETTY BLUE EYES Bronzefield Prison, Sep-Nov 2022</b>		
<b>The project received no public subsidy</b>		
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>	<b>ACTUAL</b>
Orchestra / Performers	37,350	31,530
Technical staff	39,500	39,450
Production team	26,075	25,850
Lighting / seating / sound	29,000	33,263
Costumes / set / props	37,000	33,571
Other (inc print & travel)	26,750	19,600
Central overhead	20,000	20,000
Royalties	5,000	5,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>220,675</b>	<b>208,264</b>
<b>INCOME</b>		
Tickets including gift aid	80,000	47,290
Donations from individuals	70,000	50,115
Trusts & Foundations	70,000	110,000
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>220,000</b>	<b>207,405</b>
<b>Surplus / deficit</b>	<b>(675)</b>	<b>(859)</b>

I wanted to take a moment, to say a big thank you. You do outstanding work in prisons, that truly make life changing differences to so many people, me included, because of this amazing company I found my dream. I also wanted to thank you for all you have done for me personally, introducing me to people who could help make my dreams come true, and even if it doesn't work out, thank you for believing I was good enough to do it in the first place.

Thank you.

To Wasfi,

With best wishes for Christmas  
and the  
New Year  
I hope you have a merry  
Christmas, and a very happy  
new year. from Shauna  
XOXO

Wasfi,

Thank you again for create Pimlico and bring this happiness in our life. I'm already missing everything and everyone.

I wish you a Merry Christmas  
and a wonderful 2023. 😊

with love  
Suellen Miguez



## PRISONERS TESTIMONIALS

### Suellen Miguez

Pimlico helped me find who I really am. I was really shy, hated to be in front of lot of people and now I'm totally different. I made more friends, increase my confidence. It was the best thing that happened to me in life not only in prison. Please never stop.

### Armani (Wormold)

It is so incredibly sad to know we are at the end of our journey with Pimlico #2022. I have soo many incredible memories; Wasfi telling us to "Look to God", how Kasper made a ballet warm up to calypso music, watching Helen wiz around like a fix it - mend it super hero. Ultimately it has been the greatest pleasure to watch the pro's create their interpretations of a character. To work with Ashley and

Sasha but most of all to see greater parts of my peers and even more of myself. This experience has brought us together and has brought us better, elevated even, versions of ourselves. Thank you Pimlico and thank you all. This experience has encouraged me and my peers to work on creating a creative arts club so that we can give to our peers even a fraction of what we gained here.

### A resident

I would like to thank you so much for your generosity. When I started Pimlico I was 2 fingers from breaking down - within a year I lost my liberty, house, work and the worst put my children under a constant pressure. My situation haven't change I am still facing an extradition, with no possibility to see my children when it will happen. My 6 years old son mental health is damage for life and

each day is more affected, my 19 year old daughter put her life on hold, cancel her Uni studies so she can look after him. All that keep spinning in my head, I can't focus or think of something else, I feel like I am going to explode and my life is over. But those last 6 weeks made me feel alive for a moment I will forget about all my worries, I will have a laugh, I will feel good, no medication or therapie can achieve that, so thank you again.

### **Jessica - Sutcliff**

Thanks to all the wonderful work that organisations like Pimlico do. I've loved every minute. I have never had an opportunity to do anything like this before. For the time I have been involved with Betty Blue Eyes I have felt an outer body experience as though I were not in prison. Allowing us to express ourselves through song and dance has built our confidence and tested us in many ways, primarily our comfort zones. I entered the production not knowing what to expect. I'm so glad I did I have made new friends and conquered some fears. I'm extremely thankful to have been part of this journey and eternally grateful.

### **Arthur**

Pimlico has helped me to develop self worth. Pimlico has helped me to speak up more. Pimlico has helped me to make friends. Pimlico is important in bringing people together and bringing us out of our mundane day to day lives. While we take part in Pimlico, we are all treated and treat each other like humans, not residents, not convicts, not us and them, not your not my friend so stay away, just like fellow humans and that is so important in stopping us from being institutionalised especially those of us who are here for longer sentences. It improves family ties to let our families come and see our achievements and it shows the general public that we are more than just a crime or just a number on a statistic, we are people who are talented, brave and worth second chances, worth a deeper look at who we are. This is what Pimlico has done for us

### **Jade Lewis** Operator of the puppet pig

Since doing Pimlico, I have gained so much self worth and confidence, this has been such an amazing experience and we enjoyed every second of it. I'm proud of not only myself but my fellow cast mates for going out of there comfort zones and really joining in on the process. I asked Wasfi if I could come and

work for her, she said she didn't need a pig puppeteer I told her I can be any puppeteer she needed. LOL.

### **Sian Miller** Veronica

It has been life changing. I would of never dreamed of doing anything like this. I've always enjoyed dancing but never had the confidence to do it, in front of an audience. I've loved every minute of it and completely forgot where I was. I felt like part of something. If I could tell everyone to do it I would as its life changing. Thank you so much for making this happen, I will hold this memory very close to my heart.

### **Shadae Romeo**

I'm 25 year's old and currently on remand at HMP Bronzefield, I have been for the last 12 and a half months. Remand means I'm still yet to know when I will be going home and returning back to society which hangs over my head and dims the light further on a already dim situation. Because unlike others I have nothing to work toward and no light at the end of the tunnel.

I've struggled with ADHD my whole life. I was first diagnosed at 7 and later diagnosed with adult ADHD at 18. So as you can imagine prison is a very sticky environment to navigate specially when your battling with a overly stimulated brain and a very spontaneous, over active body and character. The type that find's routine teidious and often becomes very restless and feels unfulfilled. Developing into fixated and overwhelming depressive thoughts, feelings and episodes.

Being involved in the Pimlico project made time feel a lot more lighter and brighter, freed my brain from negative thinking and allowed me the opportunity to invest my excess energy into something both positive and productive. Which ultimately has allowed me to feel a lot more at peace and function more healthily. It's protected me from to much alone time.

I'm from a working class background and grew up on a council estate. I don't know many people who attended university, travelled or even built careers for themselves. Which in some sense conditioned me into accepting my place in this world and limitations in my capabilities and feeling as if I would never fit in with others and professionals in anything. Not just performing arts getting involved with Pimlico proved to me the complete opposite. Create arts is

very welcoming, warm and brings out the innocence and joy within and nurtures your expression, self-esteem, social skills and confidence. Self belief and talent knows no class.

When you have been exposed to controlling and abusive men your not allowed to dress up, dance, be too social in public, be confident and your definitely not allowed to be center of attention, spoken too or complimented by others or it ends bad for you. That conditions your brain into learning being those ways are bad and you don't feel comfortable of safe with anything like that creating low self esteem and bad self image you become reserved, isolated and absent from yourself you just be whatever makes them happy.

Within the Pimlico experience your encouraged to love yourself, believe that your "it" when singing and dancing on stage or in rehearsals so its been extremely freeing and uplifting for me to be out of my comfort zone being all these things. Its been escaping from my past and present when tapping into creativity. Pretending to be someone else but most importantly it's been lovely to experience just being unapologetically me and enjoying myself. I haven't been able to feel that way for so many years.

I struggle socially with relationships of all sorts, work and just throughout life. I struggle to feel safe, I live in my head being paranoid, overly hypervigilant of other people in worry something terrible is going to happen, causing me to offer shut done, give up be indecisive, impulsive and or try to appease people and do as they say, with no regard of their intention. Yet every time I participated in a performance, I showed my anxiety who is boss, I was confident and I didn't need to worry of feel unsafe and isolated from people and I did this in a room full of 300 strangers teaching myself I don't need to live how I have been because I'm safe.

What's beautiful about an experience like this, is you can't be unkind to yourself your applauded a number of times throughout an evening and your showered with compliments from your peers and those who watch or help run the show. Even when you feel you didn't do great, nobody lets you feel bad about yourself or capabilities. Subconsciously uplifting you and strengthening your confidence and self esteem. It lifts you up and makes you feel loved, supported, a sense of belonging and encouraged through life.

I feel inspired to follow my passion of singing, acting and even writing. Being creative in general how it makes me feel and I feel encouraged, supported and backed by all those who took this journey with me. When I go home I know the field I want to work within because I love how it makes me feel and that is souly due to the Pimlico project.

I'm not trying to articulate that projects like this mean the world will be a victim free, crime free, happier place. However a lot of characteristics contribute to why people offend, re offend or even prolifically offend. I've been living with people who do or have done 1 or all 3 of these, me being someone too of course who has offended and known and believe, low self esteem, lack of confidence, negative views of yourself, the world and your own capabilities and place within it as well as mental, emotional wellbeing and who you surround yourself by are a driving cause of offending behaviour. This project gives a person that sense of pride, achievement, belonging, love, encouragement and confidence that a hindered soul truly needs to heal and knew and crave better for themselves. It reminds them not to give up and keep going, no matter their circumstances, past or even current predicament.

I would encourage any prisoner lucky enough to be confronted with this opportunity, to grab hold of it with both hands and reap the rewards it gives. In the words of our director Sasha "It doesn't matter if you mess up, forget your next line or move, just keep going on the right track".

I guess what I gained most is a reason to keep going and not give up.

Thank you Pimlico 2022 and thank you to the Bronzefield staff who fought for us and worked so hard alongside of us to make this happen. Thank you to all the beautiful women brave enough to try with me (Prisoners) most of all thank you to all the external investors who made it possible for us, many before us and hopefully many after us.

### Shannon

... it has helped me so much to come out of my shell and join in I have got to know so many beautiful and lovely people and am so grateful for everything. I am now so confident in my self and hope to carry on growing thank you everyone at Pimlico for everything its been amazing.

## Elizabeth

In the beginning I felt like I was out of place because I am older than most of the girls. Pimlico has helped me become so much more confident. I will remember this experience forever and would do it all over again!

## Safaa

Confidence is something I've always struggled with. I honestly don't think anyone has ever heard me sing or seen me dance in my entire life. Pimlico changed all that. Although I only work backstage doing hair and make-up, the past 6 weeks have allowed me to immerse myself into all the 'out-there' activities. I can't stop singing now (albeit terribly) and I owe a lot of my happiness to this project. I am so grateful for Pimlico (and Wasfi) for allowing us to partake in this truly joyful experience! Thank you x

## Shereen Louise Dunville

I have had a brilliant time doing Betty Blue Eyes production. The 3 main experiences I have gained from being involved is -

- My confidence has grown to a better level
- My self-realization has opened up my life to better choices and a better way of life

I have gained a bigger eyesight into what I can achieve in my life out of prison and I've gained experience in being in on stage. Singing and acting with is grate character awareness

## Stevie

- 1) The Pimlico Opera projects are amazing!
- 2) My participation has restored my sense of humanity
- 3) Good old Wasfi strikes another blow for creativity

## A resident

Pimlico has changed my life, because of this amazing project, I fell in love with the industry. I found passion, drive, excitement and discovered what I want to do for the rest of my life. Throughout all the shows that I have been lucky enough to be part of I have seen not just a change in myself but also in everyone that takes part. All of us spend time with people who we don't usually get to know, but through this project we have got to know how talented we all can be. The amazing work Pimlico do has a huge impact on not only those taking part but the whole establishment and we are all very grateful,

to all those who help to run this incredible project. Thank you.

## A resident

This whole entire experience has brought me some respite from my prison sentence. It has given the confidence I lost coming to prison. The team of professionals believed in me, have supported to bring out the best of me.

## Alvina

It definitely was an interesting journey I will never forget apart the prison days that I really want to forget. I do appreciate that Pimlico does projects like this. It really helps lots of people in here, to cope with new restricted life, like for me, it is very hard. I love that all Pimlico people: cast, managers, costumes, teachers, actors, backstage, everyone was very kind and polite and treated us like real actors.

I think that Pimlico theatre should continue what they do and make other people smile too. Thank you for this experience. I loved when boring gym became fantastic theatre, it was WOW! I've seen that guests really enjoyed the play. And the people who were doing the show were happy too, and this is the most important, I guess.

## Frenchie

To all of you who made this possible, I would like to say "Mille Merci" for giving me the privilege to take part in such wonderful adventure. It has been an out of body experience, that took me out of my current circumstances and helped me to relieve my stress and anxiety. Working among creative professionals has given me confidence, made me believe in myself and allowed me to challenge different aspects of my life. Coming closer to the end, has made me realise how much of an exceptional opportunity it has been, and how precious those moments were. I am eternally grateful to every single person who believed in this process. Once in a lifetime. Pimlico, Betty Blue Eyes, 2022. Carina Bessa -> your French noble.

## Sana Khan

I will forever value this opportunity to be a part of something I would never have been a part of outside of prison. Everyone is so nice and it's been great meeting new people. This is an amazing project within prisons which I am sure will have a long lasting positive impact on those who participated. Thank you for everything.