



Curious Shoes

A collaborative performance for people living with dementia and their loved ones



Curious Shoes Creative Approach

Curious Shoes provides an opportunity for someone living with dementia to see a piece of high-quality theatre, without it being a stressful or worrying experience. It offers a chance for them to be creative, to be seen and to be heard.

The original idea for **Curious Shoes** came from the observation that many people, particularly those in more advanced stages of dementia, are frequently curled up in their beds or chairs and often seem to first encounter a person by their shoes. The more extraordinary the shoes, the more their curiosity seemed to be sparked and their interest awakened. I then wondered what concentrating on this specific viewpoint might inspire and ignite into a creative process which would combine dance, music and singing.

From the very beginning, people living with dementia were at the centre of the research and at the heart of this approach. From the outset, I worked with a team of artistic collaborators, across different art forms, who let themselves be guided by the curiosity and interests of our focus group of experts, those affected by dementia and those caring for them. Not only did this allow us to test aspects of our process for suitability, such as music, lighting, sound and set, but also meant we could incorporate their suggestions with regard to characters, design and content into the development of the performance itself.

What a lovely experience
from beginning to end.

Person living with dementia

After the first showing of scenes, the individuality of the performers' shoes, and their movement, drew particular interest from the focus group. A pair of red high-heeled shoes, lying somewhat abandoned in the corner, attracted particular attention and were actively included (and danced with) during feedback time. A story involving the shoes began to emerge. They had been worn at a wedding together with a wedding dress of the same colour. This sparked further interest and a wish for the red dress and the red shoes to find a place in our story. The red dress does remain and inspires a dreamlike sequence in the performance.

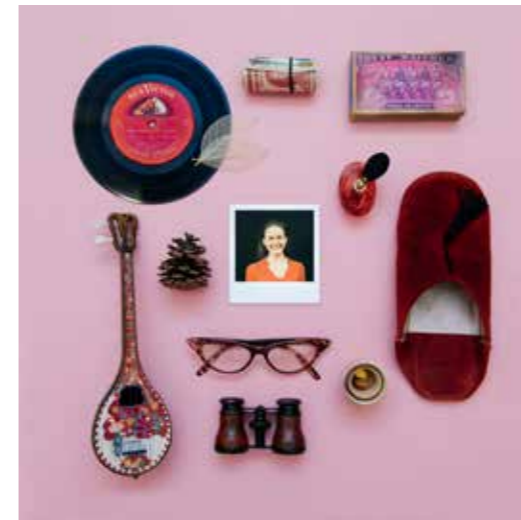
Another section, entitled **Barefoot Encounter**, also triggered very positive responses, discussion and engagement. One focus group member had many ideas on how to develop the scene and wrote us letters with drawings that illustrated his thoughts. This helped us explore different variations during subsequent showings until finding the final form.

Shoes have been ever present. They were the starting point in the development of the individual characters: Fred, Bette, Charlie and Vicky, who are lightly based on four film characters for whom shoes play an important role: Fred Astaire in **Funny Face**; Bette Davis in **Now Voyager**; Charlie Chaplin in **City Lights** and Vicky Page (Moira Shearer's character) in **The Red Shoes**.

In the design, we pay attention to a colour palette and colour contrast, widely recognised to be easily visible by the ageing eye. The tables, costumes and props are colour coded, loosely relating to the four seasons. The audience is invited to enter on a red carpet, in stark contrast to the black dance floor performance space. The set consists of a number of white sails, somewhat abstract in nature, which define the space whilst enabling us to easily create different environments and moods using lighting and colour.

Curious Shoes, a bespoke performance approach for people living with dementia, is the result of this research journey. The project held its world premiere at **Festival Theatre Studio** in Edinburgh in March 2017 and toured across Scotland in Autumn.

Curious Shoes provides a mix of structured scenes and invitations to engage, with room for improvisation and participation. There is no obvious pressure to follow a storyline, though the scenes and images are loosely connected to create a thread should you wish to find one. Small audience numbers and an intimate performance space enable the performers to connect with each individual audience member and inspire moments of connection, communication, participation and delight.





Professional Collaborators

Curious Shoes was conceived and directed by **Magdalena Schamberger**. It was brought to life by professional artists from across different art forms and the focus group of experts living with dementia. This happened over a three-week development period followed by four weeks of rehearsal.

The project commenced with a week-long creative residency, during which Magdalena and dance artist **Cai Tomos** explored initial themes and a framework for the production. Cai also provided choreographic support during the development and rehearsal of **Curious Shoes**. Following this residency, the collaborators were selected based on their existing experiences of working with people living with dementia, their particular interest in making accessible work for these audiences as well as their cross-art form areas of expertise.

Performers **Suzie Ferguson** and **Tim Licata** brought vast practical experience of working with people with advanced dementia in health care locations as part of the **Hearts & Minds Elderflowers** programme. **Brian Hartley**, visual artist, dancer and photographer and **Nicolette Macleod**, musician and physical theatre performer, made up the quartet of talented and committed performers. Brian produced the video content and graphic design for **Curious Shoes** and Nicolette composed the musical score. To kick start the development period, exercises and equipment from Magdalena's experiential **Artful Minds** training were used to provide insight to age and dementia related challenges. Together with in-depth discussions, this process informed the artistic choices made by set and costume designer **Alice Gooden**, and lighting designer **Paul Claydon**.

Curious Shoes has been expertly supported by producers **Vina Oberlander** and **Dawn Taylor**.

Many of the collaborators also brought personal insight and interest owing to the experience of knowing a person living with dementia in their families or circle of friends.



Focus Group of Experts

In the run up to the project we visited a variety of **Alzheimer Scotland Dementia Cafés** and **NHS** support groups. We were also put in touch with **Forget Me Not** participants at the **Festival and King's Theatres**, Edinburgh. **Eddie** and **Sandra**, **Ena** and **John**, **Rosie** and **Christeen** and **Wilma** and **Jim** decided to join our **Focus Group of Experts** and remained with us throughout the project. At regular meetings during the development and rehearsal weeks they gave us invaluable feedback as to what they liked and what they were not so interested in. They not only gave their insights into different aspects of the production but their opinions also helped shape the content of the performance itself as well as the choice of title, **Curious Shoes**.

Some of our experts were very generous with their time and contributed outwith our group gatherings: **Eddie** viewed the set design model and gave his opinions, whilst **John** also attended a marketing meeting. In addition, John documented the weekly development of proceedings with regular cartoon drawings of different scenes and ideas on how to progress the storyline. Although the sessions were generally filled with fun, laughter and stimulating conversation, there was also meaningful and important work taking place. Our focus group made their contributions very conscientiously and we could not have developed our project without them.

Curious Shoes is one of the best things that has happened to us in recent years.

John McFarlane, Focus Group Member



It was special for us to share the experience together as a couple.

Family member

Our Audiences

Curious Shoes is a collaborative performance experience that can be shared by those living with dementia, alongside their family members and carers. The aim was to create new moments of connection for the audience members and **Curious Shoes** was developed with those people in mind and at its heart.

To provide the best environment for individual engagement, each performance is limited to 20 audience members with 'curated' seating arrangements, considering their preferences, needs and abilities. Additionally, we advertised and split performances into:

Public performances

For people with dementia still living at home and those visiting day centres, attending with their partners, friends, children, family members and carers

Care home performances

For those living in care homes and attending with their professional carers

In 2017, we delivered **24 Curious Shoes performances** in theatres and care homes, engaged with **313 people** living with dementia and reached a total of **459 audience members** including family members, friends and carers as well as industry professionals.

Future audiences

We are looking forward to connecting with new audiences across the UK during our 2019 tour and have ambition for the project to continue to grow in its geographic reach. Due to its open format and minimal language, Curious Shoes is well suited for adaptation and translation into other languages and cultures, in addition to having great potential to tour extensively within the UK. For enquiries beyond the current tour please contact: creative@magdalenaschamberger.com



I feel like I am shining inside.

Person living with dementia

Performance Venues

Festival Theatre Studio, Edinburgh

Capital Theatres Edinburgh was a key partner venue and pivotal in providing suitable and accessible space for the development, rehearsal and premiere of **Curious Shoes** at **Festival Theatre Studio** in March 2017. Due to their genuine commitment to make their building accessible to people living with dementia and regarding them as highly valued audience members, they provide dementia training for all their staff members. **Festival Theatre Studio** was the ideal venue in which to work with our focus group of experts, develop the **Curious Shoes** approach and host the premiere and first six performances.

Touring venues

During our tour in autumn 2017, **Curious Shoes** was warmly welcomed by venues, staff and audiences alike at **Platform** in Glasgow, **The Barn** in Banchory, Aberdeenshire, and **The Beacon Arts Centre** in Greenock. We were pleased to have our performances included in **Luminate**, Scotland's Creative Ageing Festival. As part of the tour we were also delighted to deliver **Artful Minds** training to 20 artists interested in expanding their insights, skills and confidence in working with people living with dementia.

Future Touring and engagement

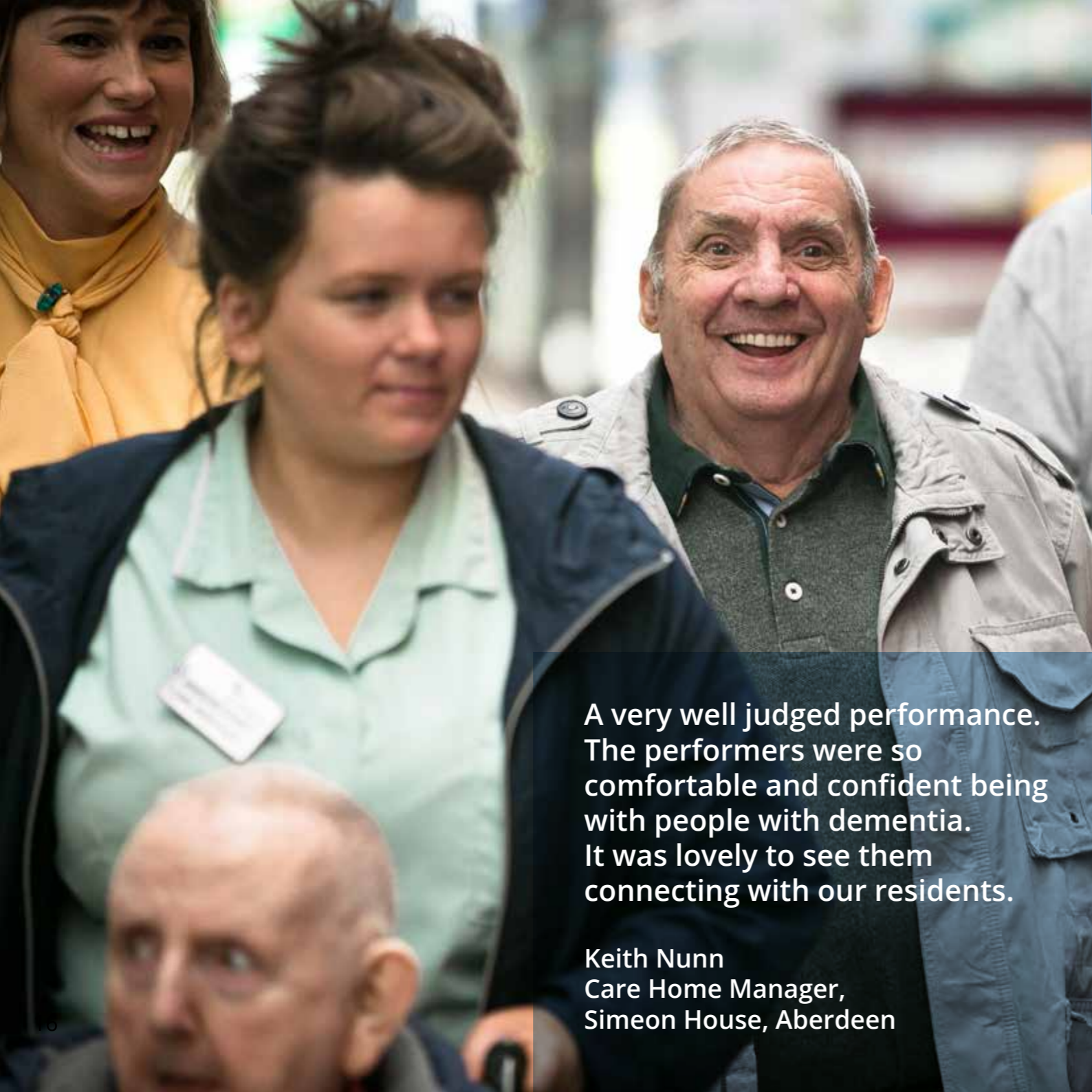
There has been great deal of interest from venues across the UK and we are delighted that **Curious Shoes** will be touring widely from May to July 2019. **Curious Shoes** will travel to theatre and community venues and into care homes, including to geographic areas where creative provision for people living with dementia is limited. The tour will also include training for venue staff in collaboration with **Capital Theatres** and Magdalena's **Artful Minds** training for artists.



The care and attention devoted to each group and individual audience member from the **Curious Shoes** team worked really well. The production values were very high indeed. The atmosphere and tone of the work felt fun and celebratory.

The show allowed us to make contact with a great deal of new audience members – many of which are particularly hard to reach. I think the show leaves the venue and staff team more aware of those living with dementia and their loved ones and what their needs and demands when attending a show are. The experience has, I have no doubt, left the staff team more confident about providing a quality experience for audiences living with dementia and more receptive about hosting similar work in the future.

Matt Addicott
Programme Manager, Platform, Glasgow



Care Homes

Many care home groups and day centres brought a number of their residents along to the theatre venues to be part of a **Curious Shoes** performance. Most care home performances were oversubscribed and some centres brought back residents on repeat visits, because they had responded so positively to the experience. Several members of the audience continued talking about the experience on their way home with some even revisiting memories of **Curious Shoes** later in the day - which care staff reported as extraordinary, considering the fairly advanced stages of dementia of their residents.

However, due to differing abilities and physical, as well as medical, restrictions, a trip to the theatre was not possible for many care home residents. We, therefore, decided to deliver pilot performances of **Curious Shoes** in two care homes to see if it would be feasible to include those settings in future touring.

Although **Curious Shoes** was specifically developed as an interactive experience for theatre and community settings, the pilots at **Simeon House**, Aberdeenshire, and **Kincaid House** in Greenock were extremely successful. Granted, that within theatre settings the performance has high production values and production elements, we have effectively managed to translate the experience to care home locations - without the use of a set design or theatre lighting - by concentrating on the interaction with the residents.

A very well judged performance.
The performers were so comfortable and confident being with people with dementia.
It was lovely to see them connecting with our residents.

Keith Nunn
Care Home Manager,
Simeon House, Aberdeen



Curious Shoes is expertly crafted and elegantly told: as a theatrical work it is actually curious in lots of ways, not quite dance yet beautifully danced, not quite story but still dramaturgically rich, it also creates real opportunity for intimacy between performer and audience while remaining expansive in its scope and ideas. The presentational language and style is genuinely unique. Its best and most charming theatrical trick however, is that it manages to live in the past, the present and the future all at same time. It's a bit like a poem you remember learning a long time ago that hasn't quite finished writing itself.

Stephen Deazley
Composer, Music & Choir Director



That was so emotional. It's absolutely the best thing I have ever been to. To see their reaction, to see these people. I am amazed!

Staff member, St Bernard's Care Home

Background and Funding

The **Paul Hamlyn Foundation** awarded a multi-year **Breakthrough Fund** grant to **Magdalena Schamberger** in 2014. The purpose of the **Breakthrough Fund** grant was to enable Magdalena to develop and expand her artistic practice by spending dedicated time researching other art forms in order to develop a bespoke theatre approach for people living with dementia. Research highlights included participation at the **Meet Me at MoMA** and **Dance for Parkinson's** programmes in New York, a visit to **Dementia Village De Hogewey** in Holland as well as a cross-arts multi-disciplinary residency, including **NHS** dementia specialists.

The creative research time resulted in the development of both **Curious Shoes**, a bespoke interactive performance approach and **Artful Minds**, a unique training initiative for artists, from all art forms, to increase engagement with people living with dementia. **Artful Minds** allows artists and creative practitioners to understand more about the experience of living with dementia, provide insights, skills and confidence and to engage and elicit different kinds of creative responses.

The first full-scale tour of **Curious Shoes** is made possible with the generous support by **The National Lottery** through **Creative Scotland**. **Curious Shoes** will be visiting a variety of theatre venues and care homes across Scotland between May and July 2019. For further information and details on venues and dates, please visit: magdalenaschamberger.com/projects/curious-shoes/.



Contact

Magdalena Schamberger is an independent creative collaborator, director and theatre maker based in Edinburgh, Scotland. Magdalena has a special interest in co-creating and developing high quality performances with and for people living with dementia, their loved ones and those who care for them. Her aim is to challenge assumptions and change perceptions about the creative potential of people living with dementia.

Magdalena uses physical theatre and a cross-arts approach to create highly visual performances, which are equally enjoyable, stimulating and beautiful. She is committed to meaningfully engaging with theatres and communities by also offering training to organisations, theatre staff and artists of all art forms. Magdalena co-founded **Hearts & Minds** in 1997 and was its Artistic Director until the end of 2017. In this role she created the **Elderflowers** programme for people living with dementia and has over 16 years of experience of working with this audience group.

Magdalena is an **Honorary Professor** with the Division of Nursing at **Queen Margaret University** in Edinburgh.

For further information on **Curious Shoes** or **Artful Minds**, please visit www.magdalenaschamberger.com or email creative@magdalenaschamberger.com

I'll remember this for the rest of my life.

Person living with dementia



LOTTERY FUNDED

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