

# Meet Me On The Move

**Event:** Trip to see No Fit State Circus event *Bianco* in the Big Top at Southbank Winter Festival

**Date:** Saturday 7 January 2017 (matinee performance)

## **Attendees:**

**Meet Me members:** Elsie, Maureen, Nick, Frank, Angie, Rosaline, Fred, Joan N, Huw, Micki, Polly (& carer Eva), Ron

**Staff:** Theresa Veith, Roxanna Kennedy, David Slater

**Volunteers:** Tom, Teresa O, Emma, Sue, Olive, Kurban, Rosemary, Liz, Richard, Henri

**Artist / documentation:** Zoë Gilmour

As part of Meet Me on the Move, we took a group of Meet Me at the Albany regular attendees, volunteers, staff and a documenting artist to see No Fit State's performance of Bianco on London's Southbank.

The show is described by journalist Arwa Haider as ***"...deeply immersive and distinctly modern, as dreamlike scenes, aerial dynamics and live music envelope its audience."***

The plan was for all the volunteers and staff to meet at 1.15pm under the arches near the Winter Festival, ready to greet the Meet Me members who would be arriving on two buses at around 1.30pm.



Zoë: *"I arrived an hour early to do a reccie...I looked around the Winter Festival and checked out the access, which seemed quite good, with ramps everywhere. It was a drizzly, grey day and the big top looked rather austere, with its closed up doors and greyish white hump. Some children circled the roller disco and a handful of hipsters were huddled around a fire pit in the outdoor bar area, while a few tourists milled about in the drizzle."*

*I turned around and spotted Kurban, one of our 'older' volunteers, doing exactly what I was doing. He looked so animated!"*

*Kurban leading the way*



Volunteers and staff were congregating under a railway arch. It was a dark and dreary day but the atmosphere was bright with lots of hugs, greetings and bubbling excitement. Some of the volunteers were a little nervous about how the members would cope with the outing, but on the whole they were positive and looking forward to it. Staff Roxanna and Theresa were extremely organised and made sure that everyone felt confident and knew what they were doing.

We were ushered towards a back entrance to the Winter Festival (near the bins - but most convenient for access!) and waited for the Meet Me members to arrive, while security hung about in the

background. The transport was provided by Excel Cabs and Lewisham Transport. Due to the number of pick-ups, people had been collected from noon onwards.



*Southbank security guards keeping an eye on Meet Me member Rosaline*

As usual it took quite a while for everyone to disembark, and there was plenty of support from the large number of volunteers present.



*People arriving...*



It felt like all the volunteers were needed - to keep everyone calm and happy and to chat; allay any anxieties, as we waited. The Meet Me members had lots of questions and in the second bus Polly had been very sick on the journey and needed a bit of cheering up.

Joan was also not feeling well, as she had hurt her arm -

and Rosemary listened sympathetically. The volunteers are very skilled at this instinctive and sensitive pastoral care, which is essential to meet people's needs and ensure things go smoothly.

Gradually we started to make our way through the gates and towards the big top. One of the bus drivers came with us too. It was a nice feeling, like an extended family, a great gang of characters - and people watched us with interest and smiles as we moved through the Winter Fair.

Our timing was good because as we arrived the audience were already going through to the show, so we didn't have to wait outside in the cold for long. Roxanna handed tickets out to individuals (rather than holding all the tickets and sending people through as a group) - which seemed more respectful, gave people more agency and enhanced the experience for everyone.

Once inside, it was nice and warm and, even before the show, it was rather dark in order to create a dramatic atmosphere, which slightly alarmed a couple of our people and made it a bit tricky to navigate. Really though, it was more anxiety-provoking than dangerous.

The Big Top hosts were smiling and friendly and quickly approached us to assist us to our places - originally they'd thought of positioning us on two sides of the tent so that we could have a varied viewing experience, however everyone quickly gravitated to one area near the merchandise stall where the chairs



were laid out in rows. Most of the rest of the audience were standing; the idea being that they would move around as the performers popped up in different areas.

Joan: ***“A lot of the artists moved around to different parts of the tent and the audience moved with them. It was what I'd call a very ‘moving’ performance - ha ha ha!”***

While we were waiting for the show to start, Zoë interviewed people about their past experiences of circuses and their expectations of the show. Many people spoke of the clowns and animals they'd seen in the past and said that it was a good thing that circuses didn't have animals these days. There was a lot of talk about elephants (in the second scene of the show the singers mentioned elephants...it's obviously something that comes up a lot).



Joan said she loved Cirque du Soleil and hoped this would be something similar.

Frank said he hadn't been to a circus since he was a little boy.

Once the performance started it became even darker. The performance took place on all sides, with the main focus on the central area.

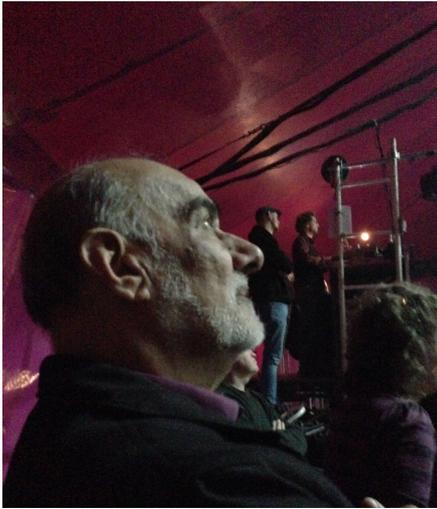
We were sitting slightly apart from the action, in a fixed position rather than moving around like the rest of the audience, but because most of the performance was high up we had a good overview of the action and were able to see most of it, with only a little of the floor work occasionally obscured by the standing audience.

The music from a live band was loud, blasting out of the speaker above our heads. The music was excellent and varied in styles, instruments and voices – and was generally loved by our group.



***Polly: “It was very skilful...acrobats doing a lot of amazing moves...and then there was a Hungarian poet who read a poem which was very clever cos he was moving on a trapeze. My carer is Hungarian and so she was very pleased. The circus was a brilliant display of ingenuity and courage and very exciting to watch, though I kept being afraid they might fall – but they didn’t of course!”***

For the most part our members watched the show intently and silently.



They appeared to be almost in a trance - they seemed spellbound.



We watched aerialists on trapeze, on silks, with flashes of fire and spinning hoops and people racing up scaffolding and bouncing around in groups; with moments of humour and dark emotion. The tightrope walker won everyone's hearts and there were people inside spiralling fringes, like illuminated jellyfish.

**Joan: "In the second half there was this man, he had nothing at all to protect him from falling...no invisible wire...and oh my gosh he was absolutely brilliant, the contortion of his body and his movement and what he did and he was so high up...it was very, very good."**



Huw:

***The trapeze work...when they were going up onto the bars, from where I was looking, it was as if it was a roman candle, with the light catching the foil coming down, changing colours from the spotlights – it was like a living firework.”***

It was warm and dark in the big top with flashing lights and loud music – quite an unusual and challenging atmosphere for our members, some of whom said they were hungry and asked for drinks and snacks and chocolate and chips. Some needed to go to the toilet. Joan asked for ear defenders.

The show went on for a long time (it finished half an hour later than expected) and towards the end a couple of people in our group became a little agitated – one person stood up from her wheelchair unexpectedly and took a tumble – and another became confused, saying she was very hungry. Luckily one of our volunteers had some sweets with her, which helped a bit. Possibly, if the show had been a little bit shorter, we might have avoided this and the journey back to the buses might have felt less hurried and given us a bit of time afterwards for reflection.

At the end of our “Meet Me on the Move” day out it seemed appropriate to ponder on this quote from Creative producer and No Fit State’s co-founder Tom Rack: *‘There is something that is uniquely special about circus. It’s the element of the collective: a bunch of people living together, travelling the world, making a show together.’*

Frank:

**“It was good. I couldn’t do it. Well, I don’t *think* I could do it...”**

Joan:

***“I think a lot of people enjoyed it, I know I did, and not only that - it was just nice being out with meet Me at the Albany people and we were able to talk about it afterwards.”***

Huw

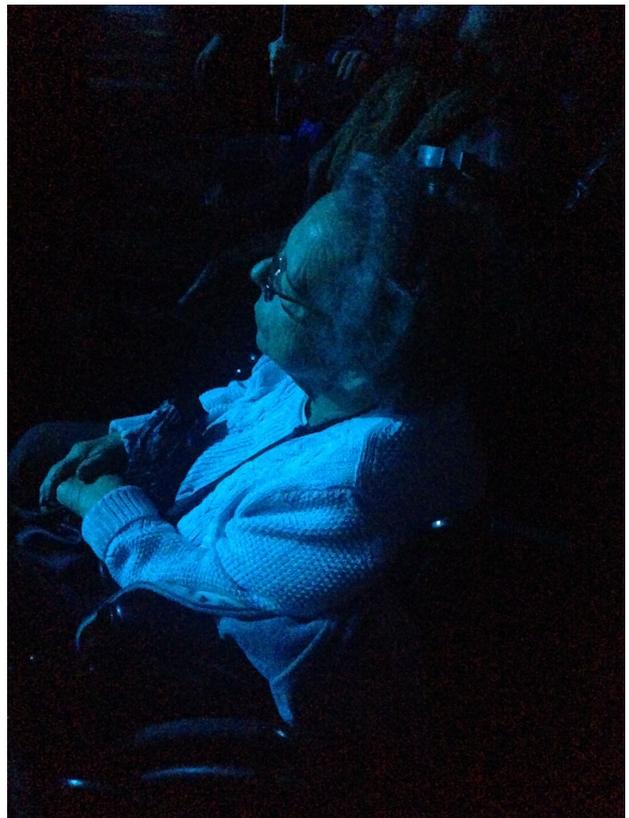
***“I was very wary when I went into the tent that I wouldn’t be able to see much (Huw is visually impaired) but I had no problems at all with it. The venue was so very good and the people I was travelling with were absolutely fantastic. All my friends were there - an all round success I would say!”***

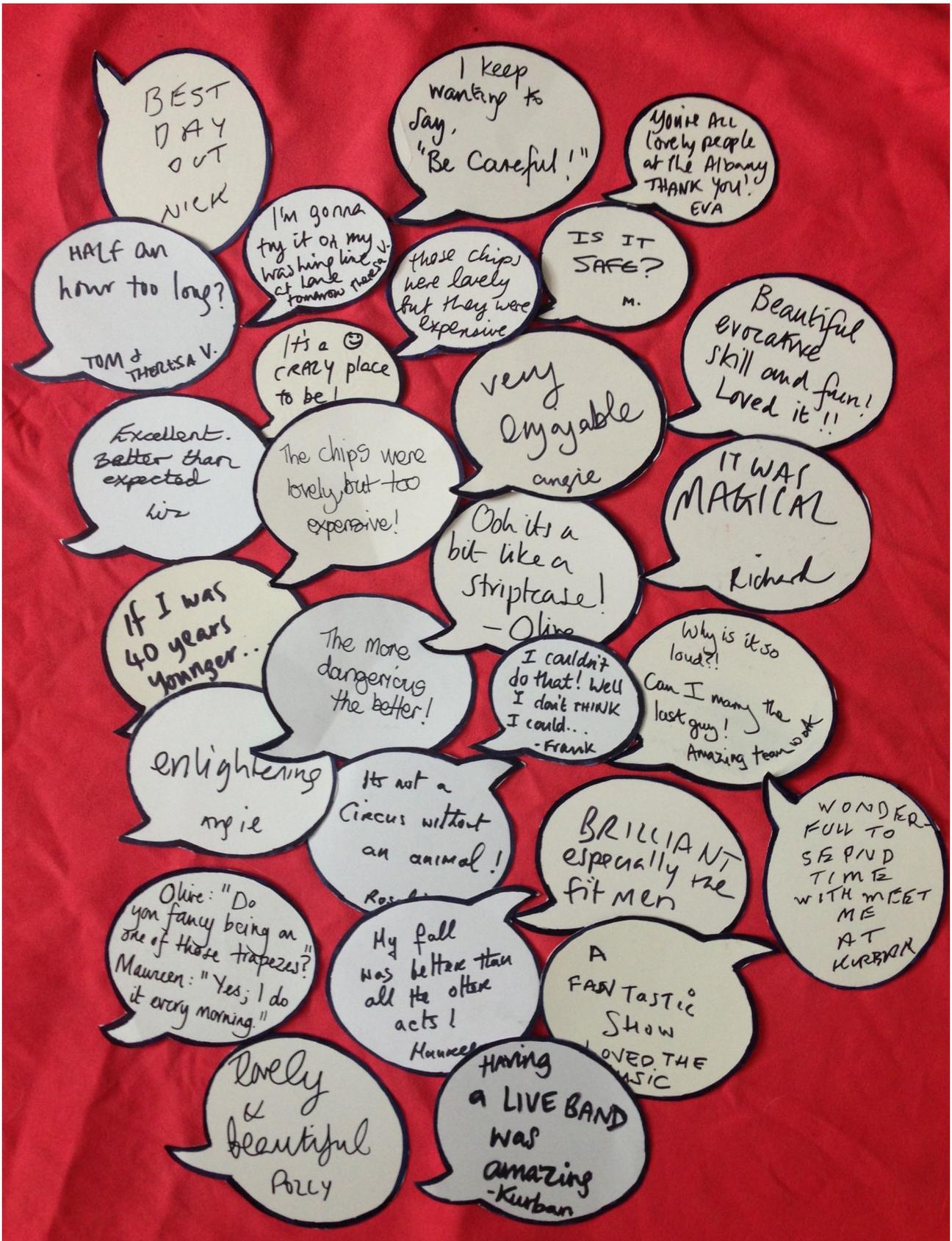
Fred:

***“Lovely, it was beautiful. I liked the acrobats, right up at the top. I wanted to go and join them! Get up there right up at the top on the trapeze.”***

Maureen:

***“It was wonderful. The show was lovely. I really appreciated being picked up from my own door and brought the whole way there and back. It was more successful than other trips for me because I didn’t have to walk anywhere. I was so glad to go out as I can’t go anywhere like that in my mobility scooter.”***





Elsie:

***“It was very good. I appreciate being picked up from home. The transport makes all the difference.***

***The only thing is I wanted to be nearer to the front to see everything and it was so noisy I couldn't make myself clear to anyone. I tried three times to tell people then gave up! I'm already looking forward to the next trip – the V & A. I want to see all the dresses.”***

\* Next Meet Me on the Move trip to Victoria and Albert Museum, scheduled for February: *‘So you want a revolution? Records and rebels 1966 – 1970’*

Roxanna:

*“I thought it was such a great trip out! I think so many people haven't been to the circus for a long time because it is associated as entertainment for families and small children and this was definitely not geared that way but had so many of the elements of traditional circus. When we were leaving and even on the following Tuesday I had people approaching me and thanking me for the trip. When we projected some photos in the morning I noticed it started conversations around the room and Frank was delighted and horrified in equal measure to see his photo had been taken ‘Oh my Gooooood! Look it's me! What am I doing up there?! Ohhhhh!’*

*Also Huw taught me a new Swansea saying.. He told me the show was ‘Cowin Lush’ – which he said is the highest compliment something can get. “*

*Written by Zoë Gilmour for Meet Me on the Move, January 2017*