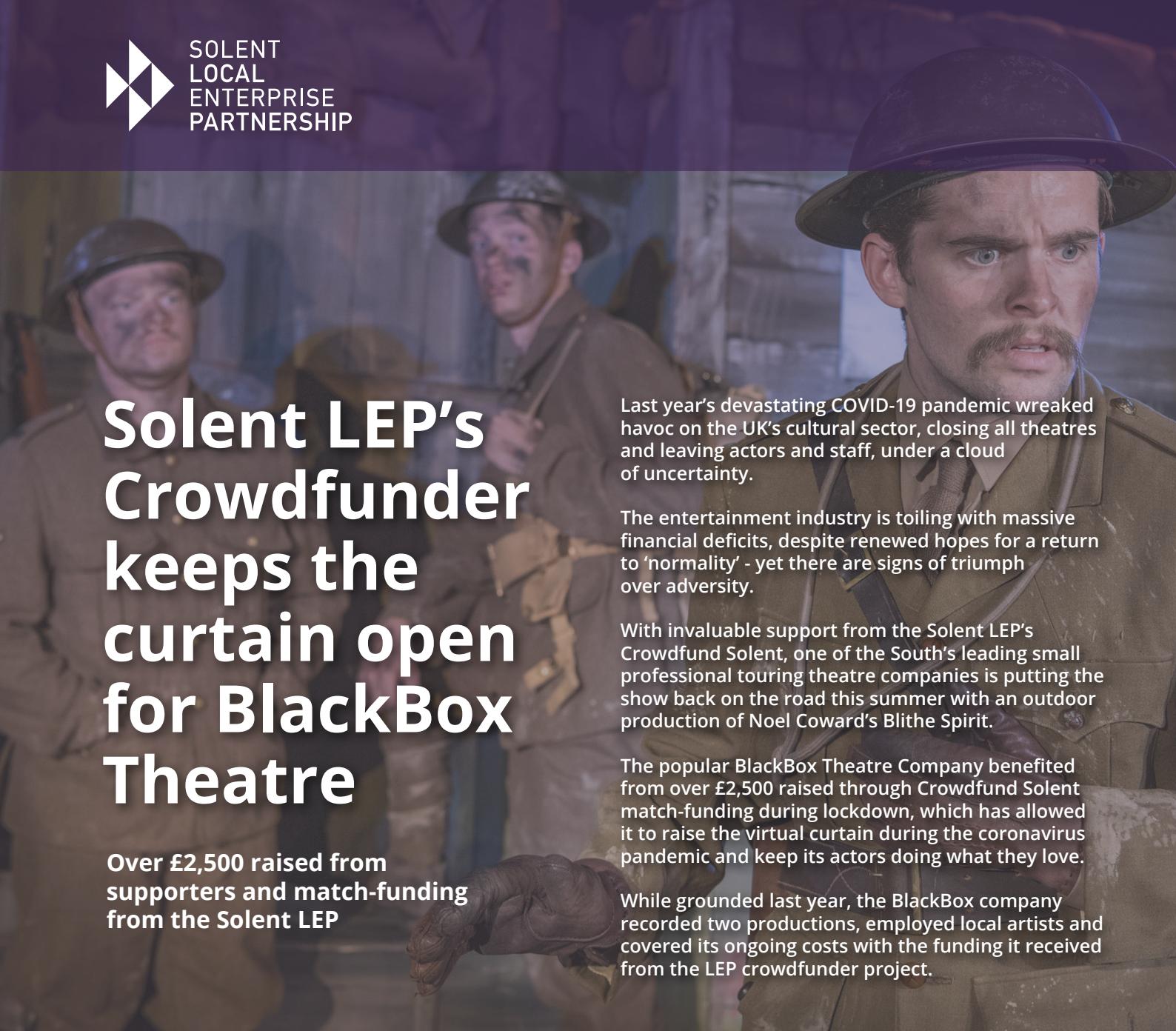


Solent LEP's Crowdfunder keeps the curtain open for BlackBox Theatre

Over £2,500 raised from
supporters and match-funding
from the Solent LEP



Last year's devastating COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the UK's cultural sector, closing all theatres and leaving actors and staff, under a cloud of uncertainty.

The entertainment industry is toiling with massive financial deficits, despite renewed hopes for a return to 'normality' - yet there are signs of triumph over adversity.

With invaluable support from the Solent LEP's Crowdfund Solent, one of the South's leading small professional touring theatre companies is putting the show back on the road this summer with an outdoor production of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*.

The popular BlackBox Theatre Company benefited from over £2,500 raised through Crowdfund Solent match-funding during lockdown, which has allowed it to raise the virtual curtain during the coronavirus pandemic and keep its actors doing what they love.

While grounded last year, the BlackBox company recorded two productions, employed local artists and covered its ongoing costs with the funding it received from the LEP crowdfunder project.



Crowdfund Solent, paying it forward to keep going

The Solent Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) 'Crowdfund Solent' fund supports small and micro businesses, social enterprises, charities and the self-employed in the Solent area who have been adversely affected by COVID-19.

By October 2020, the fund had supported 84 projects in the region. These projects have collectively raised nearly £620,000 between them, with £184,000 in pledges from the fund.

If your business needs a helping hand, find out more about the LEP's Crowdfunder by visiting

www.crowdfunder.co.uk/funds/crowdfund-solent

Business background

BlackBox Theatre Company was set up in 2016 as a not-for-profit organisation and is one of the South's leading professional touring companies, bringing exciting and innovative theatre to smaller venues and rural communities throughout Hampshire and beyond.

In 2018, BlackBox toured with Chris Hawley's award-winning play, *Bully Beef & Whizzbangs*, to commemorate the Centenary of the Armistice and in 2019, performed their new adaptation of John Buchan's classic ripping yarn, *The 39 Steps*, both of which went on to receive huge critical acclaim both as stage plays and recordings for online digital festivals.

Support from the Solent LEP

The theatre company raised over £1,500 from the CrowdFund Solent scheme, which was supplemented with a further £1,000 from the Solent LEP. The scheme is aimed at helping small businesses, social enterprises and charities facing challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to enable them to respond to the changing market.

Last year's lockdown restrictions prevented BlackBox from performing live and its autumn tour was cancelled - so they used the funding to record their 2018 and 2019 shows for online audiences, staying connected with established local audiences and reaching out to new ones.

BlackBox founder, writer and director Chris Hawley said: "The extra funding boost that we received from the Solent LEP made a huge difference and kept us going through the COVID lockdown. I'm not sure we would still be here without it"



the MULTI AWARD WINNING

BULLY BEEF & WHIZZBANGS

a radio drama by CHRIS HAWLEY



A wry and humorous look
at life in a front line trench

"evocative, funny and
thought provoking"



Where the business is today

BlackBox Theatre Company is emerging from the challenges of lockdown and looking forward to performing live theatre, subject to COVID safety guidelines. This summer, it is planning an outdoor production of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, on tour in June and July. For information [click here](#).

A production of Mike Leigh's iconic 70's comedy, *Abigail's Party* is set to be staged in October, November and December.

Chris Hawley said: "We perform primarily in village halls, churches, schools and colleges, arts centres and museums, and these are regular fixtures on our tour schedule, so we're thrilled that local audiences will be returning to see us once again."

BlackBox also performs and holds workshops in schools, colleges and universities to give students an insight into the performing arts. Last year, BlackBox was made the first Associate Artist at Hanger Farm Arts Centre which, together with its parent charity, the Minstead Trust, supports people with learning disabilities here in the South. It plans to continue its engagement with the community theatre, offering relaxed performances and workshops for its members when the COVID restrictions are lifted.

For more information visit
www.blackboxtheatrecompany.com

Or follow on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).