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## **“A Playground for Writers”: Re-imagining the Playwright at Stockroom’s Writers’ Room**

*Catriona Craig PhD, Buckinghamshire New University*

In 2020 the UK touring theatre company, Out of Joint was rebranded as Stockroom under Artistic Director, Kate Wasserberg. The name was a nod to Out of Joint’s former director, Max Stafford-Clark who co-founded the influential Joint Stock Theatre Company in 1974. Stafford-Clark, through Joint Stock and later the Royal Court Theatre, has been credited with reinvigorating British theatre’s focus on the playwright as the creative heart of theatre-making.

However, Stockroom announced it would move away from commissioning solo playwrights to formulate its new writing policy around the creation of a collective writers’ room. This marked a break with tradition and the assumption that playwright is sole author of the playtext. It could be read as a re-orientation towards practice more commonly associated with devising or the creation of long-running TV Drama.

Through interviews and observation this paper follows the Stockroom artists through the creation of their first production *How a City Can Save the World* (Stockroom & Sheffield Theatres, August 2022). I reflect on existing theories of collaborative play-making practice (Sigal, 2017) and ask whether they are sufficient to describe the vision that Stockroom has under development. At the heart of this discussion is the question of whether collaborative playwrighting retains the dramaturgical focus that prioritises the notion of a written play. This would make it distinct from those found in practices that consciously de-centre the playwright, and embrace terms such as ‘writing for performance’ or ‘playmaking’. In this context I ask, are Stockroom’s artists playwrights?

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