

The money stuff is dead confused. Matilda is run by volunteers; they've put loads of time and effort into sorting this building out, finding the materials to build the stages in skips, doing it all themselves, asking for no help from the regeneration bastards. So they don't want you or I coming in, putting a night on, and earning two hundred quid out of it. It doesn't have to be loss making, so long as it's not about profit. That's fucking cool. But at the same time it's limiting. It means that if you want to do something at Matilda, it has to be part time, so that you can earn a wage to pay for your house/kids/gas/food, or you have to go on the dole. It's that same old fucking choice again: get a job, live like a human, and try to do what you do outside of your 9 to 5, or be fucking poor and do it during the day. Can't we make a living out of the things we love? Can't we be artisans? You can't do something in the mainstream, which will change lots of people's lives. Only a few.

The biggest issue that Matilda seems to face are the restrictions that they've put on themselves as an organisation. It doesn't matter at the end of the day about money; you can get round that, do your commercial work somewhere else, whatever. But it's the fact that there's so much empty space, so many nights with nothing on, so much potential that probably won't get used. They're bound by the logic of being outside the mainstream. When we were there, someone was asking to put on freeform avante garde performances, probably to be attended by five people. That person couldn't do something at the Leadmill, or anywhere else. But by the same token, that doesn't mean it isn't shit. It seemed like the guys organising the gig space had to say yes. High aims of non-commercial space and free expression collide with shit music nights attended by ten obscurest and rooms full of people playing minesweeper on reclaimed computers. It seems like there's a potential here to create a really good, alternative culture factory. But if it's just for hardcore punk gigs or non-commercial jazz, that potential won't reach many people.

But despite these questions, it's still amazing to have a space like Matilda. And the future for Matilda is going to be really interesting. If they can find a way to consolidate what they do, to get a license to put nights on every night, to dance til 2, to open the place up with a café or something, and maybe to run it as a cooperative, with managers and paid workers and direction, then they might be onto a fucking winner. As it stands, they already have a brilliant space to create something outside of the mainstream. But that means it won't ever affect that many

I think Matilda is ace. Like many of the people we spoke to, I find the politics frustrating and inspiring at the same time. I think it's really important to show people alternatives to normal development, to wanky bars and shit bland clubs, and I think it's really important to do this off your own back. The people who have done it deserve supporting; they really believe in Matilda, and if they get kicked out, we should be there protesting for them. And it's worth saying that it's places like this that make the city cool, and attractive to people, where the culture comes from. The bands in this city at the moment will get the attention of a lot more people than the new Cafe Rouge in the town centre. The council would do well to remember that before they make any decisions about Matilda.

Matilda is another way of doing it, of reusing these spaces, and they've proved that they can. Maybe it isn't the way I'd do it, but I'm glad it's there. And you've got to love the anarchists, because at least they're asking some good questions.

"Be reasonable: demand the impossible!"

Thanks to Mozaz, Helena, Sarah and everyone else who showed us round and talked to us about Matilda.

Tom Common.

