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# A Younger Theatre

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## [Guest blog: Blast Theory takes on Manchester](#)

Posted on 25 September 2013 Written by [Conori Bell-Bhuiyan](#)

[My Neck of the Woods](#): A live stream from the young people of Manchester, telling our stories and asking our questions.



Last weekend a group of six young people – including me – took to the streets of Manchester decked out in all manner of cables and kit-bags and carrying video cameras around with us – and yes, we got a few weird looks. The cameras were streaming live, straight to a website run by digital arts group Blast Theory and this was our opportunity to show people our neck of the woods, through our eyes. Between the six of us we had three live streams going for two hours a night for people playing online – either from home or from consoles set up at the Royal Exchange theatre – to pick from and interact with.

From the *My Neck of the Woods* website those people could ask us questions, we could ask them questions, and we could even invite people into a one-to-one conversation where we could have much more in-depth discussions about anything ranging from future career paths to what the adequate jail time was for killing an alien... and that was just on my stream. No two conversations were the same and a simple question could lead to a surprisingly insightful discussion with a complete stranger. I got some great advice about what I should do when I go to university plus a few good travel tips thrown in the mix. This kind of event could be described as 'digital performance', 'online game', 'live documentary' or 'digital theatre', but in truth the concept was very simple. All we were doing was telling the real stories of our lives and talking about the real decisions we, as young people, have to make right now.

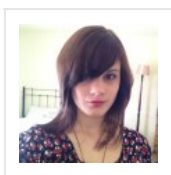
We were trying to create a connection – an intimacy – with online viewers who we never actually got to see (even though they could see us) by letting them in on our lives, and asking them to tell us about their own, all the while talking straight into a camera lens. It took a few rehearsals to get used to that part. The performance itself took place over two nights, and saw us scattered all over the city. From our base at the Royal Exchange we went out with our cameras to show you our favourite places, the cafés we go to, our houses and kitchens, our childhood dens, our old schools, the

place where a first kiss happened or the place where a regrettable decision was made.

I got involved in this project after a very exciting email appeared in my inbox. It was from the Royal Exchange Theatre and it was about a project they were running with Blast Theory as part of Manchester's involvement in the Truth about Youth programme. In the email was an idea for an online performance event that Blast Theory wanted to be created with and by young people. I love anything that experiments with the internet as a medium, so I emailed back straight away – originally planning to be involved in running the technical aspect of putting together a show like this – but once I was part of the project I found I was getting pulled more and more into the performance side of things... and next thing you know my debut live performance was being streamed live over the internet for the entire world to see!

*My Neck of the Woods* isn't Blast Theory's first online endeavour by any means. The digital arts group has mastered the live online gaming experience with previous projects like *I'd Hide You* and *You Get Me* also fusing interaction, internet participation and live streaming cameras into a full experience. If anyone is interested in getting involved in future works by Blast Theory, I'd advise you to [keep an eye on its website](#) – it's one of those groups that never stops moving and always has something on the go, so volunteers will always be welcome.

For me, this project was an amazing experience. Aside from everything I've learnt about how digital performance works, how the substantial amount of equipment involved works, how a single idea can develop into a two-night-long performance and of course, how to act natural in front of a camera... I've also met some brilliant people and made some great connections with artists and performers both. Blast Theory got completely behind us young people and pushed us to tell our own stories in what turned out to be an event unlike anything I've ever done before.



### [Conori Bell-Bhuiyan](#)

Conori Bell-Bhuiyan is a student and arts and culture blogger from Manchester. She wants to end up working as a journalist somewhere warm, and she loves anything artsy, off-beat or slightly wacky.

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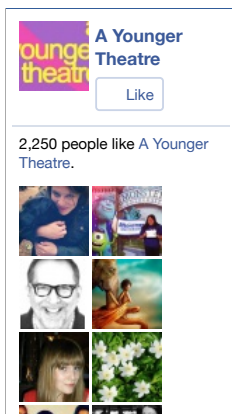
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