

## **York Theatre Royal: Service Level Agreement report**

**November 2016**

This report will give an update of delivery against the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the City of York Council and York Citizens' Theatre Trust Ltd.

The report covers the period from May to October 2016.

### **PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY 2012/2018**

SLA conditions are noted in bold with the details of how the theatre has been working to achieve them underneath.

- 1. Provide a year round programme of work which shall include in-house productions, including a pantomime, youth theatre productions, touring drama productions, and hires to local amateur companies**

York Theatre Royal opened after a major re-furbishment on 22 April 2016 with the Stage World Premiere of Evelyn Waugh's **Brideshead Revisited**.

The first production in the newly re-furbished theatre attracted record audiences and was toured to 10 other UK venues before returning to York in June with a final performance at Castle Howard as a major fundraising event for the theatre.

The second show produced at the theatre was another world premiere, **The Machine Stops**. Presented in the Studio Theatre it was an adaptation of E.M. Forster's prescient novel, set in the future, about the dysfunctional relationship between man and machine. Originally written in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, York Theatre Royal's new commission of the novel was universally well-received by audiences and subsequently toured to Hungary. It will be re-mounted in February 2017, play for 2 weeks in York and then go out on a national tour. It attracted substantial new audiences to the theatre drawn not only by the novel but also by a soundscape composed by John Foxx and Benje, well-known in the electronic music field. A one-off event with the two musicians took place in the Cold War Bunker in Acomb as part of the Vespertine partnership programme of city-wide early evening arts events.

The rest of the opening season included a combination of companies who are favourites with York audiences, including Birmingham Royal

Ballet, English Touring Opera and Northern Broadsides and special events that gave access to parts of the story of the work that took place at the theatre throughout 2015. An illustrated talk by the lead archaeologist from York Archaeological Trust, sold out and showed the huge interest in the city in the story of the city. This event was part of a new series of events called 270/360; taking a 360 degree view of 270 years of a theatre on the same site in York.

During this first season we held a week-long Festival of Children's Theatre, called **Little Feet** with productions from around the UK for children from the age of 18 months.

The summer family production was **Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Baskervilles**. A popular production for all ages and newly devised at York Theatre Royal, it made a virtue of a small cast playing many roles with a newly composed musical score.

The opening production of the Autumn season was another York Theatre Royal production in association with Northern Broadsides of a Yorkshire classic, J.B. Priestley's **When We Are Married**. Very well received by audiences in York it is currently on a UK tour.

Other highlights in a mixed programme of diverse work include **Phoenix Dance, Rich Hall, Mark Steel, Margaret Atwood, Bette Midler and Me** and **Tcha Limberger's Budapest Gypsy Jazz Orchestra**.

Over the bank holiday weekend in May the theatre produced a community play of **The Beggar's Opera**. Re-written for this special event with band and choir. 250 citizens of York spent 3 days making the play with five directors and presented the production at the end of the weekend. A unique York event that illustrated the many varieties of theatrical styles over the 300 years of theatre-making at the Theatre Royal from the first production of **The Beggar's Opera** in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The theatre hosted the **Takeover Theatre Festival** for a week in July. The Festival is managed and run by young people from the ages of 13 to 25 and brings a very different programme of performance and events to the theatre that attracts new and younger audiences. The Festival is financially supported by the Clothworkers Foundation Regional Theatre

Award. This award is worth £150,000 over 2 years and is awarded to one UK producing theatre per year.

York Theatre Royal is currently involved in a European Theatre project called **Be SpectACTive**. As part of this programme it hosted a residency with Italian Theatre Company, CK Teatro, who are developing a piece of theatre about the first man on the moon with the input of reminiscences from people in York who remember that event.

In the opening season York Light Opera presented its production of **Seven Brides for Seven Brothers**.

## **2. Provide sign language interpreted and audio described performances and touch tours**

All of the York Citizens Theatre Trust productions and many visiting companies have had sign interpreted, audio-described and captioned performances.

Overall the access facilities in the new theatre have improved radically. With a step-free ground floor, new access to the dress circle and theatre bar via a lift and much improved wheelchair positions in the dress circle and stalls.

We produce the first relaxed performances in this re-opening season.

## **3. Provide a regular Youth Theatre for at least 250 young people annually**

York Theatre Royal Youth Theatre comprises of 370 young people who take part in weekly sessions within 14 youth theatre groups split by age, Access all Areas(referral only) and two new taster groups in Theatre-Making at York St John University.

Performances of the Youth Theatre took place at the theatre and other sites. The 14-16 year old groups produced 3 plays **The Holding Place**, **Trojan Women** and **This Changes Everything**, in collaboration with York St. John University. They formed part of the Create Festival in May 2016.

The 16-19 year olds performed on the main stage at the end of the summer holidays in an adaptation of Roald Dahl's **The Witches**.

## **Outreach and Community Youth Theatres**

**Access All Areas** is the referral only theatre group that meets every week. We are working with young people from The Island Project, York Young Carers, All Together Active Youth Club, young people who have been referred to us by personal social inclusion officers and Applefields School students. The aim of this group is to make friends, build confidence and self-esteem whilst learning about theatre. They also took part in the **TakeOver** Festival Volunteer team in the Summer 2016 TakeOver Festival at York Theatre Royal.

Project Q is a now a weekly youth theatre session for young people aged 8-13 with learning difficulties and additional needs.

### **4. Provide educational activities related to each main house production, including special matinees, talks, teachers' packs, workshops and visits to schools**

As always we are working with schools on many different projects.

We have continued our ongoing long-term cross-curricula relationship with seven York schools including, Knavesmire, Joseph Rowntree and St Olave's.

And we have been working with a cohort of eight schools as the York Shakespeare Cluster. This is a continuation of the Royal Shakespeare Company Learning and Performance Network. Schools in this network include York High, Applefields, Poppleton Road Primary and Acomb Primary School. Each school group performed a 10 minute section of **The Tempest** on the main stage of York Theatre Royal as part of the opening artistic programme in May 2016.

### **5. Provide a range of activities to engage older people in activities connected with the Theatre**

The Friends of York Theatre Royal continue to offer opportunities for older people to volunteer to be involved in the work of the theatre. The Friends is an important and inclusive social club for older people. It continues to expand its activity with opportunities to be creative as well as support the theatre in fundraising and looking after audiences.

We have recruited a new team of volunteers who are leading the monthly Theatre Tours that give visitors the opportunity to learn more about the discoveries that took place through the re-furbishment of the theatre.

We continue to offer two Adult Acting classes on a termly basis that are consistently over-subscribed. Our Adult Acting class members perform a new play each term.

The York Theatre Choir is for all ages including older people. A unique choir for its attachment to a professional theatre, it is made up of singers from the scratch choirs who were formed around the York Theatre Royal large scale community plays. It continues to recruit new members and has performed at several theatre events over the last six months including a Vespertine partnership project with Fairfax House that promenaded across the city and explored the world of Georgians at Play.

We have started a new sewing group that supports the development of skills in dress-making and helps the theatre in maintaining its costume stock. Over 30 people meet regularly to make and mend and brush up their skills in a relaxed and social environment that is also a great asset to the theatre.

The theatre has recently started a new outreach group with Kyra Women's Project in the city. This is for women of all ages and is an opportunity to work with drama practitioners to develop new skills and confidence and be part of an enjoyable team project. Kyra Women's project is working in partnership with York Theatre Royal on the next large scale Community Play about the **Suffragette Movement** in York. The play will take place in York in June 2017. We opened for expressions of interest from the community to take part in any aspect of theatre-making in October 2016 and within 6 days had already had 500 people sign up for the project.

**6. Develop The Studio programme promoting new and culturally diverse work: using the space to provide opportunities for local voluntary arts organisations and to develop the creative infrastructure of the city.**

Apart from **The Machine Stops**, described above the Studio has hosted a diverse programme of work since the re-opening of the theatre in April 2016. Highlights of the programme include our production of **Underneath the Magical Moon** for 3-7 year olds that played to over 1,000 children, **The Collector**, a Edinburgh Fringe First production set in occupied Iraq, the **50+ Festival Cabaret, Kali** a storytelling evening inspired by Hindu mythology and a production, funded by the Wellcome Foundation that explored the condition of ADHD in children.

**7. Provide student placements and careers advice to support the development of a strong local creative sector**

Our major placement opportunity for students continues to be the TakeOver project for 13 – 25 year olds. In this period we created a 10 day Festival managed and run by young people at York Theatre Royal. It included work produced by the young people in both the main theatre and studio theatre as well as touring theatre from some of the best UK theatre companies.

A TakeOver Board of 15 young people and over 70 others in roles as varied as Artistic Director and Stage Technician programmed, organised and ran the Festival as a follow up to the multi-arts Festival that they produced at the National Railway Museum.

**8. Develop the De Grey Complex, along with the Theatre, as a creative production hub for the city**

The De Grey Complex has been very busy during this period since the re-opening of the theatre.

The Friends of York Theatre Royal run a weekly craft session in the Rooms and held several Craft Fairs in city.

York College performing arts students continue to be based in the De Grey Rooms for dance and drama sessions each week during term time.

There was a programme of public dance events including an opportunity to learn Georgian dances as part of a Vespertine partnership event with Fairfax House alongside its latest exhibition about Georgians at Play.

The De Grey Rooms hosted Murder Mystery events during this period.

Costume Hire and the theatre's Costume makers are based in the De Grey Rooms. They are now joined weekly by a new sewing group.

Permanent residents in De Grey House include Pilot Theatre Company and The Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers, a national agency.

The De Grey Rooms and House continue to offer creative production facilities for both the professional and voluntary arts. Companies using the spaces included tutti frutti, Flying Cloud Theatre, The Flanagan Collective, Telling Tales Theatre Company, Pilot Theatre, State of Play Theatre, Mud Pie Arts, Theatre Mill and Bad Apple Theatre Company.

### **9. Work with key stakeholders on the Cultural Quarter developments as well as other developments as appropriate**

York Theatre Royal re-opened following a £6 million capital investment on 22 April 2016.

The project was funded by Arts Council Capital Lottery Funds, York Conservation Trust, City of York Council, and many major national and regional Trusts & Foundations. The community of York contributed well over £200,000 in individual donations.

The newly re-furbished theatre has added to the cultural offer in the city. It now operates as an all-day destination with a new and popular café, bistro and bar in addition to its theatre and events for audiences and visitors.

York Theatre Royal has played host to a new exhibition from **Jorvik** called Life & Death as part of a programme of exhibitions in the city that seeks to maintain the profile of Jorvik during its re-furbishment of the flood damaged Jorvik centre.

Liz Wilson Chief Executive York Citizens Theatre Trust

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