

York Theatre Royal: Service Level Agreement Report September 2014

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 January to August 2014.

The total audience attendance from January to August 2014 was 87,819.

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**

Over the period from January to August 2014 York Theatre Royal has presented 343 performances across the Main Theatre, Studio Theatre and De Grey Ballroom.

York Citizens Theatre Trust produced 5 home-produced shows over this period including **Aladdin & the Twankeys, Brassed Off, A Number, Monday's Child and The Wind in the Willows.**

This season also included the Little Feet Festival week of the best of Children's Theatre in the UK. The theatre was given a Space theme for the week and we had performances for children from 6 months old. Highlights included the Science Museum **Energy Show, Elves and the Shoemaker** and a production of Michael Morpurgo's **I Believe in Unicorns**. This Festival is held every two years.

York Theatre Royal also took part in the city-wide Festival of Ideas, with 2 free events at the theatre including **An Audience with Michael Morpurgo** attended by 850 people, mostly young children.

This period included a very varied, high quality and very popular programme of theatre in the Main Theatre. Productions ranged from an outstanding Welsh-produced stage version of Dylan Thomas' **Under Milkwood** to the ingenious West-End comedy **The Play That Goes**

Wrong. English Touring Opera presented two operas in the season including the rarely performed Britten opera, **Paul Bunyan**. Northern Broadsides presented a new play, set during the first world war in the West Riding villages of Saddleworth and a highly acclaimed stage version of Sebastian Faulkes' **Birdsong** played to a large and appreciative audience.

During the visit of the Tour De France, the theatre played host to a number of events. These included two community choirs performing on the Main Stage in a programme of French songs and a new play called **Cis & Barbiche** about the relationship between a French Airman and an English woman who met in York. A French Officers Ball was also hosted in the De Grey Rooms Ballroom. The theatre themed itself as a French cafe for the week and in collaboration with the Yorkshire Air Museum featured a Hurricane aeroplane on its roof.

York Theatre Royal enjoyed the productions of some of the best of community theatre during the year with **Hot Mikado** and **Avenue Q** from York Light Opera on the Main Stage and in the Studio Theatre three productions including York Shakespeare Project's sold out **Twelfth Night**.

We supported a number of new theatre companies to produce in the city. Productions included **The Importance of Being Earnest** in the Mansion House and **Sherlock Homes** in The Guildhall.

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

All of the York Citizens Theatre Trust productions in the main theatre have sign interpreted, audio-described and captioned performances. All theatre productions that tour to the theatre for a week in the main theatre offer audio-described performances. All audio-described performances are preceded by a touch tour of the stage. The theatre has a pool of dog sitters for guide dogs.

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

Across the Spring and Summer terms over 300 young people took part in the Youth Theatre in 14 different youth theatre groups from the ages of 5 to 18. They attended weekly classes, extra rehearsals and Youth Forum sessions.

5-8's performed two new plays in the Studio about bees - **Misbeehiving** and **What's the Buzz?**

8-11's performed four half hour long plays in the Studio - **Jack the Giantkiller** by Oladipo Agboluaje, **A Thousand Reasons Not to Fly** by Daniel Jamieson, **The Genius** by Phil Porter and **The Seal Wife** by Brendan Murray.

11-14's did Mystery Plays for our Age in city centre churches, St Olave's and St Helen's, with two new specially commissioned pieces by Helen Cadbury.

14-16's performed 3 adaptations of Shakespeare plays in the Studio - **Macbeth**, **The Tempest** and **Julius Caesar**.

16+ have been learning puppetry and Shakespeare, and some of them created a piece to perform at **Remembrance and Beyond** – a community arts project that resulted in an event in the Ballroom in July. At the event various community groups and professional artists made a creative contribution (through poetry, theatre, music etc) that represented their response to the theme of remembrance and war. There was also representation from local charities, social and political groups, making a healthy mix of different generations, cultures, and professions.

After an extremely successful pilot last year, Project Q is now a regular session for 8 – 13 year olds with learning difficulties and additional needs. These sessions will be extra creative, playful and supportive to suit the needs of our new members!

Outreach and Community Youth Theatres

In addition to the regular Youth Theatre sessions run in the De Grey Rooms we have also introduced new sessions aimed at specific groups both in community settings and at the theatre. We manage a new Drama Group at Burton Stone Lane Community Centre, we deliver part of the Askham Bryan Princes Trust employability scheme for 16-25 year old NEETS and we have started a new referral-only weekly drama session for vulnerable young people between the ages of 12-16.

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

Early Years

Early Years work also goes from strength to strength, and we are now offering regular weekly activities with **Storymakers** for 3-5 years olds, **Singamajigs** for 1 – 4 year olds and **Sing and Sign** for babies from 6 months old.

Schools

We are working with schools on many different projects.

Across this period we have had long-term, cross-curricula relationships with York schools including, Knavesmire, Joseph Rowntree and St Olave's.

Additionally as part of the Learning and Performance Network run in conjunction with the Royal Shakespeare Company and York High School as the Hub school we are working with seven cluster schools: Acomb primary, St.Barnabas CE primary, Poppleton Road primary, Woodthorpe primary, Westfield primary, Applefields School (specialist school for cognition and learning) and Joseph Rowntree school. This relationship will culminate in a schools festival at York Theatre Royal in 2015.

During this period we launched the International Centre for Arts & Narrative with York St. John University. This offers free arts workshops to schools and community groups using a range of artistic disciplines including theatre, music, dance, storytelling, poetry, visual art and film. These are held regularly in the De Grey Rooms and support teachers in using the arts to encourage the creative imaginations of young people. New techniques and approaches to learning are explored in these workshops. This has been made possible through new funding through the Arts & Humanities Research Council. Schools who have regularly taken advantage of these stimulating sessions include Badger Hill, Hambleton, St George's, Cawood, Applefields, Knavesmire, Pocklington and Kirkbymoorside. This service for schools will continue for the next academic year and beyond.

Our Playhouse Festival of new theatre especially written for 8 -10 year olds to perform took place at the end of the Summer term with teachers and pupils from Park Grove, Archbishop of York Junior School, Sand

Hutton, Clifton Green and Knavesmire Primary directing and performing in the Studio Theatre.

We secured an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award fund for a PhD studentship on Storytelling and Adolescence with York St John University and together we appointed a storyteller who will be working in the city with students for the next 3 years.

This practice-based studentship will explore storytelling with and for adolescent participants. It sets out to develop and evaluate practice that utilises storytelling as an empowering medium through which young people can take control of actively constructing their sense of self and their place in the world and their community.

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

The new initiatives for older people that we introduced in the last year continue and include Spotlight talks and a Playreading Group. The Friends of York Theatre Royal continue to offer opportunities for older people to volunteer to support the work of the theatre. During this period the Friends fundraised to support the re-furbishment of the Cafe Patio and helped the theatre to buy new chairs and tables. A new Friends gardening team was also set up. Friends and volunteers continue to support the theatre in welcoming audiences.

We continue to offer two Adult Acting classes on a termly basis that are consistently over-subscribed. At the end of the summer term these groups performed a new play, **Thirty Little Plays About Life**, in the Studio Theatre.

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.

The Studio Theatre programme between January and August included 43 different productions.

This included York Citizens Theatre Trust productions of **A Number** and **Monday's Child**. **A Number** by Caryl Churchill was a fascinating contemporary play about identity and the ethics of cloning and **Monday's Child** was a play for 3-7 year olds about memory loss and Alzheimer's.

York Theatre Royal was part of York Literature Festival in March with a number of talks and productions.

Theatre experiences for the very young were available across this period including 5 different productions during the Little Feet Festival.

Storytelling shows included **The Iliad**.

York Shakespeare Project, Settlement Players and York Writers Script Factor all featured in this period in the Studio Theatre. Settlement Players produced Githa Sowerby's **The Step Mother**, a fascinating insight into the position of working woman in Edwardian Britain.

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

We have had a range of placements across this period.

We recruited a new intake of young people between the ages of 13 and 25 for the TakeOver Board. These young people will drive forward the next stage of the TakeOver initiative that creates opportunities for young people to manage the theatre. The tasks for this group include artistic programming for a Festival at York Theatre Royal, devising a participatory programme for young people to take part in, marketing the Festival and managing further recruitment of young people to take part in the week-long November Festival.

A further 9 student placements were offered and taken up during this period. They include Assistant Director on **A Number**, Design Assistant and Assistant Director on **Helver's Night** and Assistant Director of the young people cast for **The Wind in the Willows**.

We continue to offer short placements for school-age children throughout the year. These are always over-subscribed. These are offered through the normal carousel placements. We had 8 placements during this period.

We offer an advice surgery for young people wishing to explore pathways into a career in theatre.

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

The De Grey Complex continues to be a busy hub for different creative companies and activities.

Resident in De Grey House are 3 creative companies in addition to York Citizens Theatre Trust, they include Aesthetica who publish an international culture magazine and manage the York Short Film Festival, 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, TongueTied, Mud Pie Arts, Ensemble Theatre Company and Bad Apple Theatre Company.

York College continue to hold most of its performing arts teaching sessions in the De Grey Rooms.

The De Grey Complex continues to host events and functions all year round including in this period national and international conferences on theatre and performance.

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

During this period York Citizens Theatre Trust made a successful bid to the Arts Council Capital Fund for £2.9 million towards the £4.1 million Design & Construction project to upgrade the theatre facilities. Further bids to both national and regional trusts were also successful. £450,000 is the remaining target to be raised in the next 12 months. Work is planned to start at the end of March 2015. York Theatre Royal will be closed for 8 months and will re-open in December 2015.

Applications for Planning permission and Listed Building Consent were also successful.

Further Design development has continued throughout this period and tenders will go out to contractors in November 2014.

York Citizens Theatre Trust has negotiated a residency at The National Railway Museum during the closure period at York Theatre Royal. New

funding has successfully been sourced from the Arts Council's Grants for the Arts to support this project. Theatre activity during this residency will include a new Community Play, involving up to 500 York Citizens. It will take the story of the Railways in York as its inspiration.

York Citizens Theatre Trust has also been part of the ReInvigorate York group working to improve the public realm in Exhibition Square and St.Leonard's Place.

Liz Wilson Chief Executive

York Theatre Royal 5 September 2014.