

York Theatre Royal: Council Scrutiny Report January 2020

Community

Our nationally-recognised **Youth Theatre** goes from strength to strength: in September 2019 they mounted a production of *Hetty Feather* involving 50 children and young people from around the city, including many from our Youth Theatre waiting list. We are trying to involve the Youth Theatre waiting list more in large projects like this, so that it feels more like a participation scheme than a waiting list.

In our production of *A View from the Bridge* in October 2019, 12 **actors from the community** joined a professional cast. This is part of our commitment to involve our community in every production we make.

We have now offered an extraordinary **512 Arts Awards since April 2019**, the highest number ever in a year.

Our **Takeover Festival**, when the theatre is run by young people aged 12-26, had an environmental theme, and 48% of bookers had never been to YTR before.

Our **5-8 year olds Youth Theatre** also had an **environmental** focus and created a new story, *The Greenwood Circle*, based on the trees in West Bank Park.

We have confirmed plans to revive the hugely-successful **community drive** that we did in June 2019 for *Driving Miss Daisy*, this time for *Quality Street* in 2020. This initiative sees us drive people to the theatre who would not otherwise be able to make it.

Programme

We had a very busy and diverse programme of work in 2019. Over 7000 people saw our summer holiday family show *Swallows and Amazons*, and over 3500 saw our co-production of *Malory Towers* in just one week.

Our production of ***The Elves and the Shoemakers*** transferred to Sheffield Theatres to be their Christmas children's offer – proof the YTR is recognised as a quality and trusted creator of theatre for children and young people.

In 2020 we welcome Poet Laureate **Simon Armitage** for a special world-premiere performance for two nights in February, a community musical production of ***Oliver!*** and a family summer musical about the 'strongest girl in the world', ***Pippi Longstocking***.

Pantomime

Our pantomime has been the subject of a huge amount of publicity in recent days. With a very heavy heart, we have had to take the decision that our pantomime must change in order for it to survive and thrive. This will involve a new creative team, and there will be not be an automatic offer to the current stars of the show, as we wish for the new creative team to have free rein to create a pantomime for the city on their own terms. No-one has been 'sacked': all actors and creatives get new contracts year by year.

The current pantomime garners a huge amount of affection amongst some residents, but that affection has, over the last decade, stopped translating into mass appeal. Numbers for the pantomime have been in decline since 2008, with the exception of Berwick Kaler's farewell performances in 2018-19. In 2008 54,190 people saw *Dick Turpin*, in 2013 47,419 people saw *Aladdin and the Twankeys*, in 2017 42,153 people saw *Jack and the Beanstalk* and this year only around 31,000 will see *Sleeping Beauty*.

We were also aware than pantomimes in some other cities smaller than York (but not dissimilar) were welcoming nearer 90,000 people, while we were welcoming a third of that number. At some point 40 years ago, the Theatre Royal called time on a previous pantomime and said to Berwick Kaler, 'please do something new'. And Berwick created something extraordinary that lasted 41 years. We have reached the moment when a similar reboot is necessary.

We believe passionately in pantomime as a form of traditional Christmas entertainment, and will create in 2020 a brand new pantomime for York, featuring lots of local talent, community involvement and spectacular sets and costumes. The details of this will be announced early February 2020.

For our full take on the pantomime change, please listen to this link:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0808j64>

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York Theatre Royal

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