

YORK THEATRE ROYAL SERVICE AGREEMENT: 2009/10 END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE UPDATE

June 2010

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 It has been a challenging six months for York Theatre Royal as the economic climate in the country shifted. Having said that the Theatre has maintained strong audiences throughout the year and has continued to be able to provide a huge variety of performance and participatory work for York.

2 ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

- 2.2 Over the last six months the Theatre Royal has provided a varied programme of artistic experiences that adds to its reputation for offering diversity to its population.
- 2.3 The period was dominated by the legendary York Theatre Royal Pantomime. Once again the theatre broke its box office record, with attendance at just under 55,000. As always an extraordinary time at the theatre with huge audiences and strong community pride in a unique phenomena. This show really puts the spotlight on York in terms of national profile and is frequently described in the national media as the best pantomime in the country.
- 2.4 In addition to the pantomime the theatre produced three other shows during this period. **Whatever Next!** was an adaptation of the well-known children's book by Jill Murphy, it enjoyed a three week sell-out run in the Studio before going out on a national tour with our partners Tutti Frutti.
- 2.5 The theatre began a new relationship with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama to produce a new version of Chekhov's **The Seagull** from the well known Scottish playwright, Stuart Patterson. This is a ground-breaking venture in professional theatre to support graduating students from one of the country's most prestigious drama schools to experience work in a professional theatre. It gave the Theatre Royal the opportunity to support new actors and technicians coming into our industry as well supporting the theatre to produce a large cast show for York audiences. It attracted national attention from both professional theatres and higher education institutions and is a continuing demonstration of the role that York Theatre Royal plays in supporting young people.
- 2.6 The final new production of this period was **Catcher** a new commission by Richard Hurford. This was an intriguing new work that looked at the very

contemporary issue of the nature of fame through the story of the man who shot and killed John Lennon. This production is a co-production with Pilot Theatre Company who is based at the Theatre Royal and will tour following the performances in York.

- 2.7 During the last few months the theatre also played host to some of the best amateur companies in York in both the Studio and Main Theatres. This relationship with locally-produced work is such an integral part of the artistic programme at York Theatre Royal. The quality of the productions of York Light, Old Bomb Theatre Company, Settlement Players and York Musical Theatre Company are a testament to the creative talent in York. In this season the productions included **Beauty & the Beast**, Chekhov's **Three Sisters** and **The Wizard of Oz**. Audiences for this work over the last few months was over 15,000 people.
- 2.8 One of the areas of work that needs special mention is a project that the Theatre Royal supports with People First in York. Once Seen Theatre Company is a group of adults with learning difficulties who meet at the Theatre Royal every two weeks and worked in this last period on a production about the social history of a community in one road in York, **Haver Lane**. The production was a fine piece of theatre and the Theatre Royal will be working with the group to raise new funds to support their work and find a wider audience.
- 2.9 The Theatre Royal main house also played host to some of the finest touring theatre companies in the country across the Spring months with a very popular and high quality programme that included **Morecombe**, **Oh What a Lovely War**, **The 39 Steps** and **Sherlock Holmes**.
- 2.10 In the next few months the theatre continues a programme of theatre tours into the Main and Studio Theatres. This includes the first ever Children's Theatre Festival in June called **Little Feet**. Through extra funding for this initiative the Theatre Royal has been able to bring the best in National and International Children's companies to York. At the time of writing most of the performances during the week have sold out showing the huge appetite for performance for Children and Young People in York.
- 2.11 Over the next month the Theatre will be building to two significant productions. **The Wind in the Willows** is the summer family production in York, following on from the success of **The Railway Children** at the NRM. **The Wind in the Willows** will see the theatre transformed to an "in the round" space in the main auditorium and the foyer and café bar areas will resemble the Wild Woods that surround a crumbling Toad Hall. The Theatre is also presenting its production of **The Railway Children** at the old Eurostar platforms in Waterloo Station in London. Following on from the success that the theatre enjoyed at The National Railway Museum over two summer runs in York the production is now going to seen at an 1,000 seat venue at the station in London. The Theatre

Royal is also investigating presenting the production in other cities in the future.

3 EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION

- 3.1 The Partnership in Education project is a complementary service that the Theatre Royal provides alongside its partners at City of York Council. The Theatre Royal dedicates two members of staff to the project and this year added a further member of staff through the employment of an Education Intern.
- 3.2 In the last six months we have been working with the following 7 schools:
- Park Grove Primary
 - Knavesmire Primary
 - St Oswald's primary
 - Hob Moor Primary and Hob Moor Oaks
 - Acomb primary
 - Carr Juniors
 - Joseph Rowntree Secondary School
- 3.3 The Theatre Royal provides a tailor-made service to the schools that encourages them to consider drama as a teaching tool across the curriculum and gives access to the whole of the staff body of the Theatre Royal for all of the Schools involved. These long-term and regular relationships with schools as part of the PET project have been particularly beneficial for the participants.
- 3.4 The Theatre Royal receives a contribution of £15,000 from CYC towards the cost of the scheme. In addition schools pay a fee of £3,000 per annum to participate.
- 3.5 Applications to become a PET school for the 2010-2011 academic year were sent out in early Spring. This year's 3D marketing tool is a set of three coasters, with project information on them, which we hope will encourage the schools to engage with the project as they place their cups of coffee on them and read about the fantastic partnership opportunity available through PET.
- 3.6 The Theatre Royal manages a national playwriting project on behalf of 4 theatres. The Playhouse project commissions and workshops new plays written for 8 - 10 yr olds to perform. This is part of the Theatre Royal's continuing commitment to producing work for a young audience and results in a performance project with York Schools who work with the Theatre on the World Premiere productions with some of the country's leading playwrights. The playwright's involved in this year include Tanika Gupta, Fraser Grace, Dan Jamieson and Richard Hurford, as well as two previous Playhouse commissions by Neil Duffield and Nick Wood. Teachers from 5 local schools joined the

Theatre staff and playwrights on a retreat to develop the plays and then they have worked with their pupils on the productions. Schools working with the Playhouse project this year are Knavesmire, Park Grove, Wigginton, Sand Hutton and Archbishop of York - and the 6th play will be performed by a new group drawn from our 8 - 10 waiting list for Youth Theatre. The productions will be performed at the Theatre Royal in July 2010.

- 3.7 The Playhouse project produces a significant national legacy for the country and there are plans to publish the plays that have been written to create a new body of writing for 8 - 10 year olds to perform across the country.
- 3.8 The other theatres involved in the Playhouse project are Dundee Rep, Theatre Royal Plymouth and the Polka Theatre in London.
- 3.9 The Theatre Royal started a new weekly Adult Drama workshop led by the York-based actor Michael Lambourne. It became oversubscribed very quickly so we will be looking at extending our Adult classes and courses from the Autumn when the theatre anticipates being able to move into the De Grey Rooms.
- 3.10 The Theatre has also been developing its Early Years work and we have been awarded an Involve Partnerships Grant to work with Mud Pie Arts to provide a midweek pre-school interactive storytelling session at the theatre, in the weeks leading up to the Little Feet Children's Festival in June 2010.
- 3.11 The Theatre Royal's Youth Theatres have been very busy in the last few months. The Theatre works with over 300 young people through 14 youth theatre groups. Each group works towards a production each year. In the last few months this has included **A Midsummer Night's Dream** and **Romeo and Juliet** with the 5 - 7 year old groups and **CSI: York** with the 14 - 16 year old groups, this brought together youth theatre groups from Riding Lights Theatre Company and the Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh to produce 6 different plays with a crime theme. The 11 - 13 year groups have been working with playwright Kevin Dyer on a new piece of theatre, **Don't Worry, Be Happy**. This has been funded through the Centre for Global Education at York St John University and is a play that explores themes around Climate Change. This will be performed by the youth theatre in June 2010. The Theatre Royal's recently formed Young Actors Company of young people who have left the Youth Theatre also produced a Studio production of **Terrorism** in April.
- 3.12 The Theatre Royal has just cast its Main House Youth Theatre production which will take place in August. **Coram Boy** was originally commissioned by the National Theatre. It will have a cast of 35 young people and will include a choir of 30 recruited through a collaboration with the National Centre for Early Music.

- 3.13 Other department activities recently have included running workshops on creativity for 120 children as part of the Primary Schools Council Conference, which the theatre hosted, and delivering a new February Play in a Week for 8 - 10 yr olds over half-term.
- 3.14 The Theatre has been involved in the delivery of Volunteering Days with York CVS, CYC and York Cares through the DCSF pilot Youth Community Action Scheme in York. The Theatre has also applied through the Community Action Grant Fund to provide over 100 new volunteering opportunities for 14-16 year olds in York.
- 3.15 The Theatre has recruited its new cohort of TakeOver young people who will take on the responsibility for the running the theatre over 2 Festival periods in October 2010 and March 2011. 8 young people between the ages of 18 - 25 have initially been recruited to be the Senior Management Team for the TakeOver project and a Board for the initiative has now been formed. This is part of the national initiative, A Night Less Ordinary, and as part of the project the Theatre Royal continues to offer free theatre tickets to young people under the age of 26 to all theatre productions. Over 5,000 Free Theatre memberships have been issued by York Theatre Royal. This means that over 5,000 young people have independently registered with the theatre to take advantage of free tickets. This is one of the highest registration figures in the country and is once again a testament to the reputation that the Theatre Royal has for attracting young people to the theatre.
- 3.16 The Theatre Royal has been chosen to be a Regional Centre for the National Association of Youth Theatres. This will mean that York will host an annual youth theatre conference and festival with over 20 youth theatres visiting York for skills development and to present productions. The annual festival will take place in February 2011.

4 OTHER ACTIVITY

- 4.1 We have agreed a new shape for Takeover 2010/11 as it is still a pilot initiative for the theatre. For this year we have decided that we are going to split the Takeover Festival into two parts. One week over the October half-term and the two weeks in March . The aim with doing this is to allow the young people involved in the project to gain experience from programming and running the theatre for the first week before they embark on the two week Festival in February.
- 4.2 The Theatre Royal has been part of a Partnership project to develop cultural leadership with other cultural organisations in York. The Four York programme with Pilot Theatre, York Museums Trust and City Libraries and Archives has provided a range of training and development opportunities for staff in the four

organisations and will pay dividends in terms of partnership working in the city in the future.

5 MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 Liz Wilson joined the Theatre Royal as Chief Executive in December 2010.
- 5.2 The Theatre has started work on a new Business Plan and will be working with staff and major stakeholders on a five year vision and action plan for the theatre. This is due to be completed in December 2010. This will set the theatre's priority aims and objectives with its major partners, the City of York Council and Arts Council England.
- 5.3 The Theatre has started work on its Investors in People re-accreditation which is due in September 2010.

6 THEATRE BUILDINGS

- 6.1 The Theatre has submitted a Heritage Lottery Fund application with York Conservation Trust to support the enhancement of the De Grey rooms that will improve public access and use of the rooms. The application is for capital works and a learning and participation programme for young people to explore the heritage of the rooms through the use of them across the last 100 years.
- 6.2 The Theatre has also been working with York Conservation Trust to realise the vision of the Theatre Royal to create a dynamic creative hub for the city through the expansion of a creative participation and performance programme in the De Grey Rooms and ultimately the De Grey House. The vision for the theatre that is supported by York Conservation Trust is to link the Theatre Royal with the De Grey House and Rooms. The first stage of that project will be a move into the De Grey Rooms by the Theatre in September 2010. This will bring the Theatre Royal creative operation into St Leonard's Place and Exhibition Square and will be an important part of the development of the Cultural Quarter. Essential capital works will take place over the Summer 2010 to adapt and upgrade the De Grey Rooms for the theatre.

7 FINANCE

- 7.1 The Theatre has had a strong year financially in a very volatile economic climate. Shortfalls in income during the year have come primarily from reductions in Corporate support and Bank Interest. The box office has continued to perform well through most of the year and the Theatre Royal finds itself in a much better position than some other theatres around the country.

7.2 The Theatre was able to take advantage of the Arts Council's Sustain Fund to assist arts organisations who had found themselves in financial difficulty due to the economic recession. The Theatre Royal was awarded £110,000 over 2009/10 and 2010/11 to support any financial shortfalls to projected income from corporate sector and other sources.

8 THE FUTURE

8.1 The Theatre is working on a new Associate Artist scheme to increase the number of artists in the organisation to respond to the creative aspirations of people living in the city. We hope that this will lead to new theatre projects being developed with people of all ages in the city. The Theatre Royal has a reputation for being a very open and accessible organisation and an increase of artists will help in creating new opportunities. The Theatre has discussed this project with Arts Council England and will be applying to the Arts Council's Grants for the Arts Scheme to support the project.

8.2 The Theatre has also put a first stage application into the Esmée Fairbairn Trust to support the continuation of the concept of the TakeOver initiative. This project will create further ways in which young people take an active and responsible role in directing and influencing the work of the theatre.

8.3 York Theatre Royal, York Museums Trust and Riding Lights Theatre Company have formed a partnership to manage the York Mystery Plays in Museum Gardens as part of York800 and the Cultural Olympiad. Work has begun on developing the artistic vision, community participation and fundraising for this major cultural event. The Mystery plays Partnership is grateful to the City of York Council for its support for this project.

Liz Wilson
Chief Executive