

YORK THEATRE ROYAL
City of York Council Report

January 2011

1 INTRODUCTION

It has been a very busy and successful six months for the Theatre Royal with a high level of activity and strong attendance. The financial position has improved for the organisation through the diversification of income and higher than budgeted income levels. This success has put the Theatre in a strong position to launch an ambitious but sustainable period of development over the next few years.

2 ARTISTIC PROGRAMME AND DEVELOPMENTS

The Railway Children

At the last Scrutiny Committee we were able to report that the Theatre Royal would be re-staging its production of The Railway Children at Waterloo Station in London. The production opened on July 4 and although it was initially programmed to run for 9 weeks was so successful that it eventually ran until January 2 2011. Over 165,000 saw the production in London. It has just been announced that the production will re-open in London in June 2011 and run until the end of the year. This has been a very significant moment for the Theatre Royal and has built the reputation of the theatre as well as the city of York. Our investment, alongside the National Railway Museum, in this exceptional piece of theatre has paid dividends for the city both in terms of its profile and financial return. Bringing money back into the city through our involvement and visitors to the city through the promotion of York and Yorkshire at Waterloo. The production was the flagship promotion of Welcome to Yorkshire during the year and was used by them as a vehicle for promoting this world class city and county. It has firmly made the connection between culture and tourism.

With co-producers we have been exploring possible productions overseas and we will be able soon to announce officially that a York Theatre Royal production of The Railway Children in association with the National Railway Museum will open for a 16 week run in Toronto, Canada in May 2011.

The Wind in the Willows

Our follow up to The Railway Children in York this summer was a new production of The Wind in the Willows. The theatre experimented with taking the theatre “into the round” to offer a new theatrical experience to our

audience. The experiment was very successful and exceeded all of our expectations in terms of the quality of experience and the numbers of audience attenders. The production attracted 16,000 people and drew audiences from across the city and country with over 25% of the audience coming from over one hour's drive time from the theatre. Look North and Harry Gration added their weight to a city and county wide promotional campaign which saw The Wind in the Willows characters at a number of events across the summer including the opening of the new York Visitors Centre, the York Fiesta and Carnival, The York Race for Life, The York Community Boat Launch, the Festival of the Rivers, the Wagon Plays and the Great Yorkshire Show.

Coram Boy

YTR Youth Theatre ran an intensive four week rehearsal for a main theatre production of the adaptation of the award winning children's book, Coram Boy. Over 60 young people were involved with the production both as actors and back stage and the production included a choir of 20 from a collaboration with the National Centre for Early Music. The production was an artistic triumph for the young people and showed what can be achieved with an extended rehearsal period that mirrors what we do with our professional shows. We plan to stage another main theatre production, this time Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials with the Youth Theatre in this model in 2012.

Romeo & Juliet

The theatre opened its new Autumn season with a new production of Romeo & Juliet particularly targeted at a teenage audience. Attendance again exceeded our expectations and the production drew a significant audience of young people from over 30 schools in York, Yorkshire and the North of England. The production then went on a 10 week tour before Christmas and continues into 2011 taking the York city name across the country. Romeo & Juliet was a co-production with one of our core artistic partners, Pilot Theatre Company.

When We Lived in Uncle's Hat

Our production for younger children this season was an adaptation with music of this well known book. It was a collaboration with one of our core artistic partners, tutti frutti, and following its successful run in York it enjoyed a national tour of seven weeks.

Oleanna

Our final production before the annual pantomime was a production of David Mamet's controversial piece of theatre, Oleanna. First produced in 1992 it has always produced polarised reactions as it charts a story of sexual politics. The production was very well attended and worked well in the theatre's Studio Theatre. It is exactly the sort of work that the Studio should house offering theatregoers in York a very different experience to the main theatre.

York Mystery Plays 2012

This major project as part of York 800 is progressing well. The £100,000 contribution from the City Council has enabled the project to take on two freelance workers to start work on building the community company and designing the theatre site. Tickets for the production will go on sale on April 1st 2011. The Marketing campaign was launched simultaneously in York and at the World Travel Trade show in October to start to attract visitors to York during the Olympic year. The campaign to start recruiting the community will start in the next two weeks. The first project for community involvement will be Two Planks and A Passion in July 2011. This project will be accompanied by a Medieval Festival with York Museums Trust. We have been working with our partners York Museums Trust and Riding Lights Theatre on the governance structure for the Mystery Plays Partnership. The Advisory Group has CYC representation and it met for the first time before Christmas.

The first draft of the Business Plan was produced in October and the final budgets will be agreed in April 2011. Fundraising with Corporate partners has began. The Community Producer has also started work on identifying Trusts and Foundations for the community engagement programme.

The York Press has agreed to be a media partner on the project.

Jack and the Beanstalk

The 2010/11 pantomime is in the last few weeks of performances and should close on attendances of around 54,000. It has proved once again how important it is as part of the York seasonal festivities. It has attracted attention from the national media and is genuinely acknowledged as one of the finest pantomimes in the country.

To Kill a Mockingbird

This extraordinarily ground-breaking and much loved novel has just gone into rehearsal for a three week run in York and then a National Tour. It is a co-production with The Touring Consortium, an arrangement that means that we can afford to stage a production of this scale with a cast of 21 actors and featuring Duncan Preston as the lawyer Atticus. The popularity of the book and film is showing in the numbers of tickets sold at this stage. The production is attracting strong attendance from Schools in York and is accompanied by an Education programme. This production continues to build on the Theatre Royal's reputation for producing theatre for children, young people and families.

Little Feet Festival

The Little Feet Festival of Theatre for children took place for a week in June. With 14 performances from 6 different theatre companies and many different ways to take part in creative activity we had huge numbers of children, parents, carers and school groups through the building. They watched shows and took part in workshops, craft activities, performances, back stage tours,

making dens and generally had a very good time. The feedback all week was excellent and the whole event was extremely successful. We have undertaken an evaluation of the Festival with our partners tutti frutti and plan to hold a further Festivals in 2012 and 2014.

TakeOver Festival

Over 40 young people took part in the first TakeOver Festival for this year's cohort of young people between the ages of 12 - 25.

The Festival took place over the half-term week in October and over 20 different events took place during the week including dance, music and theatre. All of the young people took a role in either programming, marketing, back stage and looking after customers during the week. Just under 3,000 people attended events during the week. The TakeOver team immediately followed this week with planning the artistic programme for the TakeOver Festival in March 2011, this time for a two week period. This new model of splitting the Festival into two periods has enabled the young people involved to learn from the first experience to apply to the second Festival. This activity with young people has been funded through managed funds from the Arts Council of England. These funds come to an end in March 2011. We have been encouraged to apply to two new sources of funds to support this project into the future.

New Season Launch

The theatre has launched its new "in the round" season from May to November 2011 in December to great acclaim. The season will feature an ensemble company of actors some of whom will work through the entire season. The season will open with a production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and will include another family summer show with a new production of *Peter Pan*.

3 EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION

Partnership in Education

This year the Theatre is working with Carr Junior, Canon Lee, Joseph Rowntree and Knavesmire Primary. All four schools have worked with the theatre across the curriculum and have a bespoke package of workshops, activity and attendance at theatre productions. The Creative Participation team has devised and produced new primary and secondary workshop menus which have been printed and distributed out to CYC schools with the intention of involving new schools in the York City area. We are currently applying for funding from the Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts to target creative activity and attendance at the theatre at primary schools in the more deprived wards in the city. The application is for funding for a programme of activity over the next three years. The programme focuses on schools with greatest need (number of free school meals, number EAL children) predominantly at KS2 and KS3.

Youth Theatre

During the Autumn Term the 300 strong youth theatre has been working across a number of exciting areas. The 5-7s Youth Theatre have just finished a term of 'exploring the space', the 8-10s have been working on ensemble techniques, the 11-13s have been looking at modern day Shakespeare, and the 14-16s completed site specific performances of In My Father's House, a piece commissioned by us that had ten sold out performances at Fairfax House. A wonderful example of animating the stories of York with theatre.

Eight of our 16+ youth members were given the chance as part of a European funded project with Pilot Theatre Company to meet and perform with young people from across Europe at the National Theatre of Estonia in Tallinn as part of a week's residential.

YTR will be hosting two events with the Youth Theatre in January as part of our status as a regional partner of the National Association of Youth Theatres. Both events will attract youth theatre practitioners and members from across Yorkshire. The Regional Youth Theatre Festival in February has been made possible through a partnership with the Centre for Global Education at York St John University and will see 160 young people from around the county performing at the theatre around the theme of the Consequences of Climate Change.

Many new young people have passed their Arts Award with the theatre in the last 6 months, one of our youth theatre members presented the Arts Award birthday celebration event at the Globe with Ben Shepherd and we had our first Gold Award winner in December.

Young Actors Company

The Young Actors Company production of Elsewhere in collaboration with Belt Up Theatre was very successful as part of the TakeOver week and challenged many peoples notion of what theatre can be. It was a collaboration with Library Services and took place in the Central Library. It was a great success and we hope this can lead to future collaborations together in the future. The next production of this young company will be a site-specific and devised piece commissioned by Yorkshire Museum for their Celebrating Severus festival in February. These two partnership projects demonstrate the ability of this young company of actors to work collaboratively and we are especially proud that they will be working with fellow York cultural institutions.

Early Years

Following the Little Feet Festival the theatre's Early Years work continues to grow. We are now offering very well attended Storymakers sessions every Wednesday morning and Story Corner takes place as a free foyer activity every Saturday morning.

Playhouse

The Theatre Royal National Playwriting Playhouse project that it manages on behalf of 4 theatres culminated in five schools performances at the Theatre Royal in July. This means that five York Schools performed the world premieres of new plays from some of the country's leading playwrights. Teachers from the 5 local schools joined the Theatre staff and playwrights on a retreat to develop the plays and then they worked with their pupils on the productions. Schools working with the Playhouse project this year were Knavesmire, Park Grove, Wigginton, Sand Hutton and Archbishop of York.

Feel Involved

The Theatre Royal was successful with an application to York Youth Community Action Fund to support new volunteering opportunities for 14-16 year olds at the theatre. This initiative was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and was managed in York by a partnership of City of York Council, York CVS and York Cares. This funding supported 25 14-16 year olds who hadn't any prior engagement with the theatre and focused on the TakeOver Festival. The new volunteers devised creative activities for their peers and were part of the TakeOver team that managed the Festival activity. York Theatre Royal also supported the citywide project to encourage 14-16 year olds to volunteer by taking part in volunteering taster workshops at 12 secondary schools.

5 ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Arts Council support and future funding

All Regularly Funded Organisations received a 0.5% cut in grant funding in this financial year, 2010/11. This was in response to the reduction in the Arts Council funding of £23 million in 2010/11. The value of the 0.5% cut was just over £3,000 at York Theatre Royal. The Theatre's 3 year Funding Agreement comes to an end in March 2011 and the Arts Council confirmed a 6.9 % cut for all regularly funded organisations in 2011/12 following the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Theatre Royal is now applying to the new National Funding Programme for 2012-15 and will enter a new four year agreement with the Arts Council. The new level of funding for this period will be confirmed from April 2011. The theatre is applying to be a Strategic Partner for the development of high quality arts activities for children, young people and families.

Investors in People

The Theatre regained its Investors in People standard during the summer with a very complimentary report from the external assessor.

De Grey Complex

The Theatre will be moving into the newly re-furbished De Grey Rooms by the end of March. There will be an Open Day and the first in a new series of public dance events on April 16 2011. Part of the re-furbishment includes the restoration of the magnificent Ballroom which will offer York a new venue for public dances and private events. The theatre has been actively fundraising to install a lift to allow level access throughout the buildings. The development of De Grey Rooms is part of the theatre's wider plans to create a complex of new buildings across the Rooms and House and ultimately through a new linking building with the main theatre that will house a number of organisations and initiatives around creative industry. During 2011 the theatre will open a new International Centre for Arts and Narrative called iCAN with York St John University. This will focus on developing best practice in using the arts to enhance learning. During 2011 new creative organisations will move into the De Grey Rooms and House creating a new hub of Creativity in the city centre.

Liz Wilson
Chief Executive
January 2011