

YORK THEATRE ROYAL
Performance Report

2010 / 2011

1 INTRODUCTION

Another very busy and successful six months for the Theatre Royal with a high level of activity and strong attendance. The Theatre has opened its ambitious “in the round” season with an ensemble company at the same time as opening two productions of **The Railway Children** in Canada and in London. The financial year came to a successful conclusion however the year ahead will be challenging as the Theatre works with reduced funding from the Arts Council and rapidly changing economic realities that are changing audience behaviour.

2 ARTISTIC PROGRAMME AND DEVELOPMENTS

Jack and the Beanstalk

The 2010/11 pantomime reached attendances of around 54,000. Next year’s pantomime was announced on the final night, it has a distinctly York feel, as always. Berwick has decided to call it **York Family Robinson!** That’s a mix of Swiss Family Robinson, Robinson Crusoe and that something else that is uniquely part of the city.

To Kill a Mockingbird

The production built on the Theatre Royal’s reputation for producing theatre for children, young people and families. It was a great success both artistically and financially, attracting the largest number of attendees at the theatre for a piece of drama. Over 12,000 people saw the production in York, including over 40 schools and then the York Theatre Royal production went on tour across the country for ten weeks attracting further audiences of over 75,000.

TakeOver Festival

Over 50 young people “took over” the theatre to produce the TakeOver Festival. The Festival was over two weeks and had 25 performances from

theatre companies from across the country. York Theatre Royal will be raising funds to continue to offer this extraordinary opportunity to young people to take over their theatre in York for a few weeks each year for the next few years. The funding to support this project has now come to an end. Two applications have been made by the Theatre to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Esmée Fairbairn Trust.

New “in the round” Season

The theatre opened its new “in the round” season in May. This ambitious project will see 8 new productions at York Theatre Royal over the next 6 months. The Theatre has been transformed from its usual configuration of the traditional Proscenium Arch to a new stage built across the stalls seating and with a new bank of seating on the stage. This has created an almost round performance area with seating on most of the sides. The Theatre experimented with this last year with **The Wind in the Willows** to great success as a pilot for considering this year’s season. The Theatre is also managing an ensemble company of actors throughout the season so that audiences will be able to see actors performing in many different roles across the season. In effect it means that actors will be rehearsing in the day time and performing in the evening. It is an interesting business model for the theatre and York Theatre Royal has attracted a lot of national attention for model.

The Crucible

The season opened with a new production of Arthur Miller’s classic *The Crucible*. This was a co-production with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and included their students working on the production as their final year assessment. With a company of 18 actors it launched the season with a superb production that was enjoyed by large audiences and attracted lots of interest from schools in York and beyond.

My Family & Other Animals

The second production in the season could not have been more different and gave the acting company a very different challenge and our audiences a chance to see the same actors in very different roles. This was the world premiere of a new adaptation of this classic novel from Gerald Durrell and it attracted lots of attention from the national press with very good reviews in *The Times*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*. It was an

extraordinary theatrical piece with large scale puppets and youth theatre participants.

Two Planks & a Passion

The Theatre has been working with a community company of York people since March on this new production of Anthony Minghella's hilarious and moving piece of theatre about staging the Mystery Plays in York. The cast also includes members of the professional ensemble cast and it has been a very fitting way to embark on the Mystery Plays for 2012. Members of the York Community are not only represented on stage but also worked alongside the Theatre on making costumes, stage management and marketing. This is the start of the new Mysteries Company of the York Community who will work alongside the theatre for the next year.

Parlour Song

The Theatre also opened its first Studio show of the ensemble season. It is the regional premiere of Jez Butterworth's play **Parlour Song**. Jez Butterworth has recently won awards in New York for his much garlanded play, **Jerusalem**.

York Amateur Companies

We have had a strong showing from the York amateur theatre companies across the last six months. Four companies have worked at York Theatre Royal. In the Studio Settlement Players presented Ibsen's **Ghosts** and Old Bomb put together a collection of new writing from York writers alongside some classic pieces from Pinter. York Light produced an outstanding production of **Crazy for You** and York Musical Theatre produced the rarely performed **The Slipper and the Rose**. Between them these productions attracted audiences of over 9,700 showing our vibrant this part of the artistic programme is at the Theatre Royal. The Theatre Royal also supported York Write to select and produce four new theatre pieces from York-based writers in the Studio Theatre which played to packed and appreciative audiences. The final York Write Script Factor Final will be held at the Theatre in July.

The Railway Children

The success of York Theatre Royal's production of **The Railway Children** continues. In May 2011 a new production opened in Toronto, Canada to great acclaim and is due to perform in a newly constructed theatre in the

centre of the city until the end of October. The National Railway Museum was involved in the production once again and a locomotive from the collection was shipped out to Canada to complete the production. It is anticipated that this production will be the first in a number of North American based productions over the next several years.

At the same time **The Railway Children** steamed back into Waterloo Station and opened in June with another new production, this time featuring comic and actor Marcus Brigstocke. Reviews have been five stars for the show and it will continue to play over the summer months and into the Autumn with the possibility of running until Christmas. “Welcome to Yorkshire” are once more involved with the project using the production as a vehicle to promote the city and region in London.

York Mystery Plays 2012

This major project for the city continues to make good progress and will form a major part of the York 800 celebrations in 2012.

York Theatre Royal, York Museums Trust and Riding Lights Theatre Company have formed a new company to manage the event. This new company will include directors from the three organisations on its Board. Its main responsibility will be to manage this high risk project on behalf of the city.

The partnership is working towards the main launch of the project on July 18th at which we will present the artistic vision, an overview of the site, outline its historical context and give the community of York imaginative ideas about how they can get involved in supporting and celebrating this unique part of our city’s historical and contemporary tradition. The launch is being held at the Theatre Royal and will include contributions from all the partners. It is aimed at a broad spectrum of people in the city to galvanise their imaginations as individuals, business leaders and community leaders to share in this significant event at the heart of the city’s theatrical tradition and a high point in the York 800 celebrations.

The tickets for the Mystery Plays went on sale at the beginning of April. Partly to coincide with the Olympic tickets going on sale but also to be able to respond to the demand from longer lead in groups and international markets as well as the partnerships’ members groups. The Communications teams from the three partner organisations are working

well together on a marketing and communications plan and campaign. They have held meetings with Welcome to Yorkshire to tie in with their campaigns for Summer 2012 and have already placed some international advertising with Visit Britain.

York Theatre Royal is also working with City of York Council on a project for York 800 called York Stories to unearth and give voice to all the stories, historical, contemporary and future that have formed this great city.

3 EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION

Education

It has been a busy time with the intensive work with the four Partnership in Education schools and our one-off schools' sessions and activity around **To Kill a Mockingbird**, including the production of an education resource pack to accompany the show.

As the long-standing Partnership in Education project with the City of York Council draws to a close we are currently working on exploring our provision for schools and looking at ways that we can connect with more schools outside of partnership work that encourages them particularly to come to us, rather than us going to them. This is all being thought about in context with and relation to our potential role in the new International Centre for Arts and Narrative (iCAN) working with the University of York St. John.

Youth Theatre

The Theatre Royal's 300 strong Youth Theatre has been as active as ever over the last six months.

The youngest group of 5-7 year olds have done a performance project and made a film. **Jeremiah and the Dark Woods** and **Cops and Robbers** were both lovely pieces that were performed to family and friends in the studio and reflected a great deal of hard work by both groups. And then during the production of **Two Planks** and **a Passion** they made a film about York Stories, in which they interviewed members of the York community about their life here. This project forms part of the run up to York 800 and the York Stories project.

The four youth theatre groups of 8-10 year olds produced four new theatre productions in the Studio Theatre **Dark Age**, **Following Pharaoh**, **100 Reasons not to Fly** and **Dreaming By Day**.

The 11-13 year olds devised 4 new plays around the theme, **Gifted**. Each group put together a box of different items which they gifted to another group to create a story inspired by the objects. They have also done a project around our co-production of a new play inspired by Romeo and Juliet with Pilot Theatre Company, **What Light**.

The 14-16 year olds have worked around the themes in **To Kill A Mockingbird**, the main house production, with access to the director and the cast and then have gone on to work on **The Crucible** with the cast and director. They will be producing new work for performance in the Autumn Term.

The 16+ theatre groups performed 2 new pieces of theatre around the theme of climate change at the Regional Youth Theatre Festival, **A Moral Obligation** and **You've Got Whale**. The 16+ has also had careers sessions with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama students during their time at the theatre performing in and working back stage on **The Crucible**.

Graduate Youth Theatre Company

Snickleways Theatre Company is the new graduate theatre company that those over 20+ have formed. The company has only been formed since for a few months, but have already led an open rehearsal for the open day and successfully got an Access Grant for £630 from Arts Award for them to go as a company to the Edinburgh Fringe and see shows and network. They are also in the process of applying to perform at Galtres festival and are looking into an opportunity to take a production to Kenya.

Young Actors Company

The Young Actors Company performed their commissioned piece **Celebrating Severus** at the Yorkshire Museum, which was part of a wider festival, partly as a pilot to see if more creative practical work could take place in the museum. All parties involved deemed the project to be highly

successful and feedback was extremely positive. We are discussing further opportunities to collaborate again in the future

The Young Actors Company is also preparing for its next production, **Little Angels**, written by York-based writer, Hannah Davies. This will be performed in September by the young company alongside two older actresses from the community of York.

Regional Youth Theatre Festival

This took place in February and we had 10 youth theatre groups from all over Yorkshire represented between the ages of 14-25. All the young people participated in workshops and saw performances from other youth theatres and the event was given the theme of Consequences and was in partnership with The Centre for Global Education and the National Association of Youth Theatres. The weekend was a great success and is set to be an annual event.

Early Years

We continue to offer 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 we manage on behalf of 4 national 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 are Knavesmire, Park Grove, Wigginton, Sand Hutton and Archbishop of York.

5 ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Arts Council

The theatre is pleased to announce that it has become a National Portfolio Organisation for 2012 - 2015. The Arts Council assessment of the

application gave the theatre a strong rating for the contribution that we would make to the Arts Council goals.

Liz Wilson and Damian Cruden have since had discussions with the theatre's lead officer at the Arts Council and the Head of Theatre from the national Arts Council. These were positive meetings that demonstrated an appreciation of the theatre's work and our position both regionally and nationally. We will continue to work with the Arts Council to access strategic funds to support our contribution to the portfolio of national touring and our support of new companies and artists. We will also pursue a relationship of support with the national and regional organisations that have been funded by the Arts Council to focus on their strategic goal of extending high quality arts opportunities for children and young people.

Fundraising

The Theatre organised a number of fundraising activities to support the Theatre's Access For All Fund to improve access for all people to the theatre and its buildings. As part of opening up the De Grey Rooms the theatre held a Dance-A-Thon in the newly restored Ballroom. Over 200 people took part and raised over £7,500 towards the fund. The Access for All Fund currently stands at £20,275.

De Grey Complex

The last six months have been a very busy time for the organisation. The Theatre moved out of its premises in Walmgate that has housed its rehearsal rooms, wardrobe and costume departments and at which we stored all our props and furniture. All of these activities and departments have now moved into the De Grey Rooms.

York Conservation Trust has done a superb job of restoring the Rooms and the Theatre opened them officially with an Open Day in April. Since that time we have held a number of public events including a Tea Dance and a 1940s dance night. All of the public dance events have been very well attended. The Theatre has now launched the Ballroom as a new function room in the city and we have had interest for weddings, parties, balls and conferences.

The Theatre is now working with the York Conservation Trust on making progress on making a move into the De Grey House now that the City of York Council has vacated the premises.

The plan is to move into the house over the course of 2012.

Liz Wilson
Chief Executive
July 2011