



York Citizens' Theatre Trust

Scrutiny Report, February 2023

Community

Since re-opening to the public in May 2021, York Theatre Royal has gone further than ever before in terms of the reach of its community engagement work. We believe that every resident of York has the right to enjoy the benefits of a creative life.

Children & Young People (CYP)

We are delivering in various ways on the ambitious aims for CYP in *York's Creative Future*, the CYC-approved culture strategy for York. The strategy calls for York to be “the first city to achieve cultural entitlement for all children and young people”.

- Youth theatre: Since 2021, we have decentralised our Youth Theatre with great success, in order to increase ease of access. There are now YTR youth theatres in Dringhouses, New Earswick and at York St John University as well as in the city centre.
- Partner schools: we are currently working in close partnership with Badger Hill Primary School and Knavesmire Primary School, and through our Shakespeare Associate Schools programme we also maintain partnerships with Poppleton Road Primary, Clifton Green Primary, Fulford School, Applefields School, St Barnabas CE, Scarcroft Primary, Vale of York Academy, and Acomb Primary.
- Access All Areas: We are really proud of our Access All Areas provision which supports young people who might face barriers accessing our activities. We support participants to thrive in a way that suits them and meet each young person where they are. Young people come to Access All Areas for lots of reasons, for example they might face economic barriers, experience anxiety or other circumstances that mean a more relaxed workshop space suit them best. The groups are free and referral only. These groups take place in Tang Hall Explore, York High School (Acomb) and in the York Theatre Royal Studio. Our new AAA group is specifically for



young people with learning disabilities and we're supporting this group to take part in ***Sovereign***, our Summer 2024 community production.

- We are running a project with CAMHS (Children Adolescent Mental Health Services).
- Alongside IDAS we are running workshops for children who have witnessed/experienced domestic violence.
- As part of HAF (the holiday activities and food programme), we are running free workshops during the holidays for young people on free school meals.

Adults

As well as the work for CYP, we also provide opportunities for adults to increase their participation in high-quality creative activities. These include:

- Chatty Mondays, a conversation cafe with care-provider Home Instead;
- weekly Mental Health & Wellbeing sessions with York Mind;
- our choir;
- Adult Theatre Workshop;
- Theatre for Wellbeing in partnership with Mind;
- Opportunities for Ukrainian refugees;
- Monthly Women's Group as a long-term offer after our collaboration with KYRA;
- Monthly sessions with The Hut – for adults with learning disabilities and/or mental health challenges; and
- Supporting Pilot Theatre and RAY (Refugee Action York) monthly sessions with Sanctuary Seekers.

Artistic Programme

YTR is known nationally for its large-scale community plays, and we are currently in-between two major projects of this type. ***The Coppergate Woman*** in July 2022 saw local writer Maureen Lennon's play imagine a Viking woman wandering among the people of York during the first Covid lockdown. Over 100 community members took part in the production, as performers, stage management, costume-makers, photographers and singers.

In July 2023, we will build on this by mounting a world premiere community play, ***Sovereign***, adapted by Mike Kenny from the York-set novel by C. J.



Sansom. This will be staged at King's Manor in partnership with the University of York, and the number of overall participants will increase to over 200. Every time we produce a community play, we aim to ensure that at least 33% of participants are new to York Theatre Royal. Participants in our community plays report increased wellbeing in a number of areas – 99% of participants said that they were 'inspired to continue involvement in projects such as this'; 83% said they had 'a great time'; 73% made new friends and 41% reported increased confidence. We are working with the Cultural Commission Partnership in the city to further develop the metrics we use for understanding wellbeing impacts on participants.

We relaunched the York Theatre Royal pantomime in 2020 with ***The Travelling Pantomime***, before returning to the main house with ***Cinderella*** in 2021 and the ***All New Adventures of Peter Pan*** in 2022. The new YTR pantomime has enjoyed extraordinary new audience percentages – 61% of *Cinderella* audiences were new to the theatre entirely (49% for *Peter Pan*). This shows that this theatre is bucking national trends in its ability to attract new audiences to theatre. The new pantomime has also achieved notable critical success (2 successive five star reviews in *The Stage* for *Cinderella* and *Peter Pan*).

Wuthering Heights premiered at the theatre in November 2021. It was York Theatre Royal's first ever co-production with the National Theatre and is now enjoying a sell-out US tour.

Finally, the theatre has been successful in winning a number of national and regional awards that help put York on the map. ***Mugabe, My Dad and Me***, our first York-made production in 2021, won the UK Theatre Award for Best New Play. Recently, the theatre won the Yorkshire Post's 'Event of the Year' Award for ***An Evening with Kyiv City Ballet***, the first ever visit of the Ukrainian ballet company to the UK.

Financial Viability

The theatre was recently successful in its bid to remain on the Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio. This means the theatre will receive revenue



funding of £598,000 per year from ACE for the 3 year period between April 2023 and March 2026. While this is excellent news, especially in the context of many theatres suffering devastating cuts, it represents a standstill funding amount and therefore a real-terms cut. The theatre has sufficient reserves to continue for the foreseeable future.

City of York Council have funded the theatre with capital funding grants in 2016 and 2020, which have allowed us to purchase greener lighting equipment and to develop a new pocket park for the city, with step-free access for the first time ever, in the patio garden area between De Grey Rooms and the Theatre Royal. The other major use of this funding has been to increase access for wheelchair users around the building. Capital funding of this kind helps us develop new revenue streams, for example with our 'Tea & Tour' programme and with increased outdoor café sales on the new patio.

Buildings

YTR enjoys a collaborative relationship with its landlord, York Conservation Trust (YCT), who assumed ownership of the building from City of York Council in 2015-16. Together, the organisations have drawn up *Layer 9: Opening Doors*, a scheme to further improve access to the whole building, to increase revenue potential and to increase environmental sustainability. Plans are available on request.

Michael Slavin
Interim Chief Executive
20 February 2023