

York Theatre Royal: Biannual Update Report

May 2017

This report will give an update of delivery against the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the City of York Council and York Citizens' Theatre Trust Ltd.

The report covers the period from November 2016 to April 2017.

PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY 2012/2018

SLA conditions are noted in bold with the details of how the theatre has been working to achieve them underneath.

- 1. Provide a year round programme of work which shall include in-house productions, including a pantomime, youth theatre productions, touring drama productions, and hires to local amateur companies**

The last 6 months in the main theatre has included a range of theatre work including theatre made in York and toured into the city from around the UK.

The biggest production during this period was the annual pantomime. This year, in the newly re-furbished theatre, it was **Cinderella**. An audience of 46,000 enjoyed a spectacular return to the theatre following the pantomime that we presented in the Signal Box Theatre.

Our theatre work that was made in York included a new play about the relationship between Agatha Christie and Margaret Rutherford called **Murder, Margaret and Me**. This was a gem of a production and starred Susie Blake as Margaret Rutherford and Nichola McAuliffe as Agatha Christie. The theatre has plans to tour this production nationally in 2018.

And at the end of April 2017 we opened a new production of Anne Bronte's **The Tenant of Wildfell Hall**. A new script of this classic novel that was written while Anne Bronte was a governess in York, it was commissioned by York Theatre Royal and our co-producers Bolton Octagon Theatre.

Productions that toured to the theatre during this period included the classic psychological thriller, **Night Must Fall**, the acclaimed Matthew Bourne Dance Company with **Early Adventures**, Sandi Toksvig's newest play, **Silver Linings**, and the award-winning musical **RENT** in a 20th anniversary production. Other highlights in the season included English Touring Opera with a double bill and Northern Broadsides new production of the classic, **Cyrano de Bergerac**.

Productions from our community partners in the main theatre included **The King and I** by York Light Opera and **Turandot** by York Opera.

York Theatre Royal played host to two city-wide Festivals. **Aesthetica Short Film Festival** used spaces in the theatre to show films and to hold masterclasses and industry events in November. York Theatre Royal was the hub for this year's **York Literature Festival** in March. Across the organisation we held speaker events, performances, workshops and advice surgeries for writers. As part of the programme Sue Perkins played to a packed house for an evening of wit and anecdote from her best-selling memoir **Spectacles**.

2. Provide sign language interpreted and audio described performances and touch tours

All of the York Citizens Theatre Trust productions and many visiting companies have had sign interpreted, audio-described and captioned performances.

Overall the access facilities in the new theatre have improved radically. With a step-free ground floor, new access to the dress circle and theatre bar via a lift and much improved wheelchair positions in the dress circle and stalls.

We also now programme relaxed performances as part of our produced work.

3. Provide a regular Youth Theatre for at least 250 young people annually

York Theatre Royal Youth Theatre comprises of 370 young people who take part in weekly sessions within 16 youth theatre groups split by age,

Access all Areas(referral only) and two new groups in Theatre-Making at York St John University.

In the last 6 months the youth theatre has performed a newly commissioned play, **Forward to Victory**, within the Castle Museum. This play followed 5 York lads through the First World War. They also produced a play called **Fugee** at York St John University that followed the story of unaccompanied minors who arrive in London and are abandoned on the streets of the UK.

Outreach and Community Youth Theatres

Access All Areas is the referral only theatre group that meets every week. We are working with young people from The Island Project, York Young Carers, All Together Active Youth Club, young people who have been referred to us by personal social inclusion officers and Applefields School students. The aim of this group is to make friends, build confidence and self-esteem whilst learning about theatre. Members of this group are being supported to take part in the large-scale community play, **Everything's Possible**, in June 2017.

Project Q is a weekly youth theatre session for young people aged 8-13 with learning difficulties and additional needs.

4. Provide educational activities related to each main house production, including special matinees, talks, teachers' packs, workshops and visits to schools

As always we are working with schools on many different projects.

We have continued our ongoing long-term cross-curricula relationship with seven York schools including, Knavesmire, Joseph Rowntree and St Olave's.

And we have been working with a cohort of eight schools as the York Shakespeare Cluster. This is a partnership project with York High and the **Royal Shakespeare Company** Learning and Performance Network. Schools in this network also include Applefields, Westfield Community Primary, Poppleton Road Primary, Clifton Green Primary, Heworth CE Primary, Fulford School, Joseph Rowntree School and Acomb Primary School. All schools in the network will be performing at York Theatre

Royal in the **York Regional Associate Schools Festival** in early May 2017 in a piece of theatre that explores the themes of migration, separation and identity.

5. Provide a range of activities to engage older people in activities connected with the Theatre

York Theatre Royal is producing a large-scale community production called **Everything's Possible – The York Suffragettes**. This community collaboration is for all ages, but includes a substantial number of older people in acting, costume-making, photography, marketing and all other roles back and front of house. The community cast of 150 has been meeting for performance skills sessions since January 2017 and the first read through of the script with all parts cast took place on 3 April 2017. Rehearsals now take place 3 times a week at the Methodist Church Hall in St. Saviourgate. The community costume-making team has been meeting since December in the De Grey Rooms. They meet several times a week and will be making around 500 costumes for the production. The production will take place in June 2017. It will open on the Minster piazza and then the audience will come into York Theatre Royal. Our partners in this production are Pilot Theatre Company and BBC Radio York.

The York Theatre Choir is for all ages including older people. Meeting every two weeks it works with a professional Musical Director/Conductor who curates a number of choral events within the theatre programme. In the last six months the YTR Choir were part of the Christmas celebrations at the theatre including a carol concert in the De Grey Rooms Ballroom and they contributed to a unique event in the Studio Theatre in April in a partnership with St. Leonard's Hospice called **Nine Lives**. Many of the YTR Choir members are also part of the Community Choir that has been formed for **Everything's Possible**.

We have a new sewing group that supports the development of skills in dress-making and helps the theatre in maintaining its costume stock. Over 30 people, mostly older women, meet regularly to make and mend and brush up their skills in a relaxed and social environment that is also a great asset to the theatre. Many of these women are part of the larger

community costume-making team who have been formed to costume the community play.

The theatre has been working with a group of women within the Kyra Women's Project in the city. They are working with one of the theatre's drama practitioners to develop new skills and confidence and be part of the community cast for the next large scale Community Play about the suffragette movement in York.

The Friends of York Theatre Royal continue to offer opportunities for older people to volunteer to be involved in the work of the theatre. The Friends is an important and inclusive social club for older people. It continues to expand its activity with opportunities to be creative as well as support the theatre in fundraising and looking after audiences. It has a very active mixed gender group of older people who meet every week to make crafts to sell.

We have a team of volunteers, mostly older people, who lead the monthly Theatre Tours that give visitors the opportunity to learn more about the history of the theatre and the site.

We continue to offer two Adult Acting classes on a termly basis that are consistently over-subscribed. Our Adult Acting class members perform a new play each term. This is a mixed-age group.

6. Develop The Studio programme promoting new and culturally diverse work: using the space to provide opportunities for local voluntary arts organisations and to develop the creative infrastructure of the city.

The Studio Theatre programme gives the theatre an opportunity to produce and present work in a more intimate setting and offers a very different experience to audiences of what theatre can be. In addition York Theatre Royal is producing work in other less traditional settings to support theatre-makers who produce work that is more immersive and more interactive.

Across this period we presented 25 different productions in spaces other than the main theatre auditorium.

In the last 6 months the theatre has produced a show for 3-7 year olds that was a promenade performance across the public foyers in the

theatre. **The Mischief Before Christmas** ran throughout the Christmas season and delighted young audiences in a unique performance experience in the new front of house spaces at the theatre. We also supported two local theatre companies to produce work that used the city of York as their setting, this included **The Great Gatsby** and **Frankenstein**.

The Studio Theatre played host to both professional and community theatre projects and performances.

Community Theatre partners Settlement Players produced a production of Sheridan's **The Rivals** and Jessica Swale's **Blue Stockings**. The first production fitted the brief to show theatre from across York Theatre Royal's 270 year history as part of the opening season and the second production fitted the brief for 2017 to be a year at York Theatre Royal that concentrated on women's stories.

We also worked with the community theatre company Out of Character on a new piece of theatre called **Objects of Terror**. Out of Character is a community of actors in York who have used mental health services.

York Theatre Royal was the hub for York Literature Festival and as part of the 10 day festival we presented storytelling from **Story Pocket Theatre** and the **Crick Crack Club**, talks from authors and journalists in the Studio Theatre as well as a programme of free events across all parts of the theatre foyers.

Other diverse work in the Studio included **Made in India**, a new play about a surrogacy clinic in India, **Maiden Speeches**, an evening of theatre and debate about women working in politics and **Nine Lives**, a newly translated German play with audience discussion about death and dying that we produced in partnership with St. Leonard's Hospice.

Our production of **The Machine Stops** which was so successful in the opening season in 2016 was revived in February 2017 and then went on a national tour.

7. Provide student placements and careers advice to support the development of a strong local creative sector

Our major placement opportunity for students continues to be the TakeOver project for 13 – 25 year olds. In this period we recruited a new

senior management team for the Festival who have been bringing together the artistic programme for the next Takeover Festival in October 2017.

We continue to work with schools in York to highlight careers in the theatre and we work across the curriculum to use theatre and the theatre business to support learning in schools.

8. Develop the De Grey Complex, along with the Theatre, as a creative production hub for the city

The De Grey Complex has been very busy during this period.

York College performing arts students continue to be based in the De Grey Rooms for dance and drama sessions each week during term time.

There was a programme of public dance events including Big Band Dance nights with a live band and a Burns Night Ceilidh.

The De Grey Rooms hosted Murder Mystery events during this period.

The Rooms hosted the York Society of Artists annual exhibition and the Art Print Fair.

Costume Hire and the theatre's Costume makers are based in the De Grey Rooms. They are now joined weekly by the sewing group and the community costume makers.

Permanent residents in De Grey House include Pilot Theatre Company and The Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers, a national agency.

The De Grey Rooms and House continue to offer creative production facilities for both the professional and voluntary arts. Companies using the spaces included tutti frutti, The Flanagan Collective, Telling Tales Theatre Company, Pilot Theatre, Rich Seam Theatre, Mud Pie Arts, Open Clasp Theatre, Theatre Mill and Four Shadows Theatre.

We launched a new artist development network, IGNITE, which is seeking to support artists and theatre makers in the city.

9. Work with key stakeholders on the Cultural Quarter developments as well as other developments as appropriate

York Theatre Royal re-opened following a £6 million capital investment earlier in 2016.

We have now had a full year of trading in the newly re-furbished theatre. Attendance by audiences has been buoyant and the turnover of the theatre café, restaurant and bars is up by 40%.

Liz Wilson Chief Executive York Citizens Theatre Trust

2 May 2017