

19 June 2007

Dear Big Brum

Congratulations on your 25th birthday. The survival of a TIE company for a quarter of a century is cause for celebration indeed. And not only survival but continual development over this time, both artistic and educational. This must be something of a record in the world today. You must be congratulated above all for your dedication to the nurturing and educational development of young people. One should say their human development, as your work is always broader than even the widest notion of an educational agenda. All your strivings have been dedicated to this one end: a humanising education through theatre and drama. It would have been so easy, and the direction in which so many other companies working with theatre in schools have travelled, just to have worked for short-term gains and gone for teaching the National Curriculum. Yet, you have taken the extremely hard and principled route of working to bring to young people riches that aren't in the National Curriculum, focused as it is on delivering information and testing children's ability to recall what they have been taught to pass their tests: a memory trick really.

Important beyond measure has been your decision to work so closely with Edward Bond. To work with the leading playwright in Europe, to win his confidence, to be the first to put on his plays for young people and conversely, to give him a place to work in the UK, has seen an unrivalled partnership develop, unique in the educational world. I recall the thrill of being at the world premiere of *Tune* recently, which took place before and with an unsuspecting class of primary children at Pegasus school, a school with an outstanding head teacher. What an important event to have this leading playwright come straight from the French National Theatre, as it were, to work in a small primary school in Birmingham.

Much of this is due to the foresight and perseverance of your Artistic Director, Chris Cooper, who deserves a special mention on this occasion. He and his talented team have weathered every storm imaginable to be here today. Congratulations to him and to you all. Let's have another quarter of a century.

Very best wishes

David Davis

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