



BIG BRUM

Theatre-in-Education

NEWSLETTER

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Spring 2007

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Director's Notes: **Big Brum celebrates 25 years in TIE**

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

First let me take this opportunity to wish you a belated New Year and all our best wishes for a successful 2007.

We have delayed the publication of the newsletter to the February of this year to coincide with our 25th birthday. Big Brum began its first project, funded (for those of us old enough to remember it) by the Manpower Services Commission in February 1982. One of the founder members and the inspiration behind the Company was Pete Wynne-Willson. Many of you will know of Pete's work, if not had personal experience of working with him. Pete maintains his commitment to Big Brum, and the continuity with those early days, as a member of our Management Committee.

The Big Brum of 2007, of course, is very different to the Big Brum of 25 years ago in many ways. As a company we have grown in size and stature and developed a body of work we can be very proud of. But we like to think that in the most fundamentally important

way Big Brum remains true to its founding principles, at the heart of which is a commitment to the young people of Birmingham.

A large part of our energies this year will be devoted to preparations for our 25th Birthday event at the Crescent Theatre on 1-2 June. We invite all of our friends and colleagues to join us there to celebrate our work. One of the most important developments in the work of Big Brum over the last 12 years has been our collaboration with Edward Bond. We will be performing *The Tune*, his sixth commission for the Company and his first for young people aged 9-13 years old, as part of the celebrations.

The event will also include performances by our Youth Theatre and sister companies *Theatr Powys* from Wales and *Round Table* from Hungary. *Round Table* is now directed by Adam Bethlenfalvy, who many of you will remember worked with the Company between 2004-06 as a recipient of the Geoff Gillham International Memorial Fellowship.

It is our intention, however, not only to celebrate the past and the present but also to look to the future. That is our most important responsibility. The driving force for change over the last 25 years has been the changing world in which we live. The pace of change and the situation we face as a society presents us all with profound and complex problems, problems that go to the heart of what it is to be human. We owe it to the young people we parent, teach and nurture, to give them opportunities to confront these problems, imaginatively and creatively; to create their humanness. There can be no more important task. It means putting the needs of young people first. The last 25 years have been dominated by a social agenda, particularly within education, which has not put the needs of young people first. As we celebrate where Big Brum has come from and create a vision for the future, we need to have this at the forefront of our minds.

Chris Cooper
Artistic Director

Events

Crescent Theatre performance

Thanks to all of you who attended our performance of 'The Balancing Act' at the Crescent Theatre in December. It was a delight to see so many familiar faces along with plenty

of new ones. The event was completely sold out and we even had a waiting list for tickets!

Our thanks also to Shakespeares Solicitors who kindly provided the refreshments for the pre-performance reception.





The Janus Korczak memorial statue in central Warsaw.

Big Brum Youth Theatre

Big Brum Youth Theatre took their production of *One Hundred Thousand Whys*, a play about the experiences of Jewish and Gypsy children in the Warsaw Ghetto during WWII, to a theatre festival in Warsaw in October.

BBYT report on their visit to Poland –with thanks to BBYT member Mari Walker.

In October Big Brum Youth Theatre went to Poland to perform 'One Hundred Thousand Whys' at the International Theatre Festival for Children and Young People in Warsaw.

It was an amazing week which began with a visit to Krakow, where we stayed for one night and got a taste for Polish culture. The next day we took a train to Warsaw and attended the opening ceremony of the festival.

During the course of the week we got to share in the work of several other companies who were also performing, and on Thursday 5th October it was our turn to take to the stage in front of a full house of Polish children. The performance went well and we all agreed that it was the best we had done it.

Aside from the festival we spent several days visiting historical sites of the Holocaust, which we were shown by our tour guide, Yankel, who was

very passionate about Jewish history and taught us an amazing amount. One of the places we visited was the Jewish cemetery which was a very moving experience.

Yankel also took us to the Treblinka death camp outside Warsaw. When we arrived we were all shocked by the silence that surrounded everything. We heard about the conditions the Jews lived and died in whilst at Treblinka, and saw the symbolic markings of where the train tracks, platform, gas chambers and 'grill' once were. One of the most horrendous things was being able to find fragments of bones; the remains of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who had been murdered there just over sixty years ago.

Our visit to Poland has had a big impact on all of us. Seeing sites where people suffered immensely was a very emotional experience. I don't think any of us will ever forget what we saw. It is impossible to understand why someone would kill others for no reason but their faith and race. To kill six million for what they believed is unimaginable to us, but now, thanks to our visit, it's not just a figure, we know it's six million individual lives. We are all very grateful to everyone who helped make this trip possible, especially Ceri, and we are all proud to be members of Big Brum Youth Theatre.



BBYT at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw.



The symbolic train tracks at the Treblinka Camp outside Warsaw

“I want to continue learning about history: it makes you more human to find out about the past.”
BBYT member



New year, new logo!

To coincide with our 25th birthday year, Big Brum's designer, Ceri Townsend, has created a new Company logo. The new logo will be officially launched this month when it will feature on the Big Brum birthday card and will take its place on the Company letterhead.

Company News

Last term saw the arrival of several new colleagues here at Big Brum, and was also marked by a departure. Since our last newsletter we have been joined by two new actor-teachers, Liz Brown and Danny O'Grady, both of whom worked as actor-teachers on our recent tour of 'The Balancing Act', and happily will be staying on to perform in 'The Tune'.

Liz joins us from the Greenwich and Lewisham Young People's Theatre (GLYPT) where she had been working as an actor-teacher for two years, and Danny

toured with the Midlands Actors Theatre.

We were also joined by designer Alan Swapp. Alan, an old face on the TIE circuit, took time out from life in Australia to design and build the set for 'The Balancing Act' and stage manage the tour. He was a huge asset to the Company over the four months he worked with us, both on and off the road, and he will be sorely missed. Best of luck to you, Alan.

We also sadly said goodbye to actor-teacher, Joanne Underwood. Jo first

joined the Company in 2000 as a freelancer, and then as permanent member of the team a year later. Jo became one of the 'faces' of Big Brum, establishing herself not only as an extremely gifted programme facilitator and actor-teacher, but as an authority on young people's learning and development. She will be hugely missed, not only by her colleagues at Big Brum, but by all of the schools and young people she has worked with over the years. We wish her every success and happiness for her new life in the North of England.



Latest: Leading human rights activist becomes Big Brum patron

It gives us enormous pleasure to announce that Shami Chakrabarti has agreed to become patron of Big Brum.

Shami has been Director of Liberty (The National Council for Civil Liberties) since September 2003. Shami first joined Liberty as In-House Counsel on 10 September 2001. She became heavily involved in its engagement with the "War on Terror" and with the defence and promotion of human rights values in Parliament, the Courts and wider society.

A Barrister by background, she was called to the Bar in 1994 and worked as a lawyer in the Home Office from 1996 until 2001 for Governments of both persuasions.

Since becoming Liberty's Director she has written, spoken and broadcast widely on the importance of the post-WW2 human rights framework as an essential component of democratic society. She was recently appointed a Governor of the London School of Economics and the British Film Institute and a Master of the Bench of the

Honourable Society of the Middle Temple.

Given that Big Brum's work is based upon a recognition of human rights for children and young people, including the right to education and culture, we feel that Shami's support will help the Company to further develop its role as an advocate for the young people we work with and for, particularly the most disadvantaged.

We are hugely excited at the prospect of developing this new relationship with Shami.

International

One of last year's highlights was the number of international invitations received by the Company.

After a very successful exchange with Hungarian company Kava in the spring, and an invitation for Chris to speak at the prestigious Avignon Theatre Festival in July, the Company have since performed at the Midi-Mini-Maxi Theatre Festival for Children and Young People in Bergen. This was the second time we have performed at the event in

Norway, where a growing number working in drama in education are taking up and developing the practice of theatre in education.

Most recently, Big Brum's Artistic Director, Chris Cooper, shared a platform at the National Theatre School in Paris with Pascal Charvet, from the French Ministry of Education, and Alan Françon, Director of the National Theatre, in a symposium about the work of Edward Bond. It was another important opportunity to

share Big Brum's work with Edward Bond for young people, and the Company is grateful to the British Council in France for sponsoring Chris' participation.

At the turn of the year, Chris was also in Athens to teach a weekend course in Drama in Education. The course was run with a group of young teachers from across Greece for the Pan Hellenic Association for the Teaching of Drama.



Káva Cultural Group

Current work

The Tune

A new play by Edward Bond

A half-day programme of theatre and participatory workshops for yrs 5-7.

A city. Here. Now. Shattered glass. An act of vandalism or something more sinister? A young boy Robert stands accused. He has locked himself in his room and refuses to come out. Sally, his mum, has a new boyfriend called Vernon and everything is changing. Lies are told as truths and it is hard to know who to believe. Robert is determined to be heard.

The Tune, an extraordinary new play by Edward Bond, is a story of love, truth and lies, freedom and responsibility.



Edward Bond is one of the world's greatest playwrights. He has written over 40 plays, many of which have been produced at the Royal Shakespeare Company, The National Theatre and the National Theatre de la Colline in Paris and in over 50 countries. This is his sixth play for Big Brum in a remarkable collaboration that began in 1995, and his very first play for young people aged 9-13 yrs old.

Supported by: A & N Ferguson Charitable Trust, Arts Council England, Baron Davenport's Charity, Birmingham City Council, The Bryant Trust, The E & D Cadbury Trust & The Sir Barry Jackson Trust.

Forthcoming work

In autumn-winter 2007 Big Brum will touring a brand new play for KS4, written by playwright and artistic director, Chris Cooper.

Chris has had several of his plays professionally produced, including *Virtue*, *All at Sea* and most recently *Angel*, which will be toured by Welsh company Theatr Powys in the spring.

Expect more about our autumn programme in the next newsletter.

Dates for your diary

Mon 26th Feb: 'The Tune' begins to tour primary schools.

Tues 6th March: *It's For Real*– An Arts Included network event run by aliss @ MAC. Big Brum will be leading a demonstration workshop on the value of drama as a tool for learning. This session is aimed at anyone working with children or young people excluded from mainstream education, or at risk of exclusion.

Fri 1st & sat 2nd June: Big Brum 25th birthday celebration event.



If you would like more information about the event please send an email to claire@bigbrum.plus.com with 25th Birthday as the subject heading.

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