

the drama department

Hasland Hall Community School, Hasland, Chesterfield. S41 0LP
01246 273985

29th May 2007

Dear Big Brum,

Happy Birthday and congratulations on twenty-five years of original, challenging, imaginative and useful work, which for the past fourteen years I and my students have been privileged to be part of.

The first programme that I booked, as an NQT was 'Getting to It' by Geoff Gilham. An awe inspiring, deeply provocative piece, which my students devoured: 'That Minos was a right one Miss wasn't he?' one girl said as they came out of the play! Later when Big Brum had gone and we sat around a Map of the city of Knossos – the students literally stroked the Map and started to talk with such animation about the city, about living under a dictatorship, about the truth behind the myth of the Minatour. The drama they created was carefully and beautifully structured: a child running from the open doors of the labyrinth, bloody and pale, screaming: 'he's not a Monster he's human' – that child is then seized by the soldiers and is never heard of again. In one moment they had embraced the meaning and content of the play and had used the art form in all its complexity to show that – in a way that they had not been able to before their day with Big Brum..... and I *still* use that material and it *still* resonates and my Year 11s leaving last week *still* talked with fondness of the 'Minatour Drama'.

It has been the Edward Bond plays though which I have most enjoyed working on and being part of: what an experience for me and my students, to take those plays into our drama work and our everyday lives, to have worked at that level of Theatre theory: what other company for young people (or perhaps 'people') is offering such an understanding of the art form? Two favourites: '11 Vests' which students recognise and know so well and 'The Balancing Act' which is such an explosive mixture of theatre form at its sharpest and energy and crucial questions for all of us living in this

world that all students who have worked on it have loved it, embraced it, talked about it non stop and used it.

Your work has an impact on students: it impacts on them and their lives and touches them in unexpected and very moving ways. My abiding memory of the first tour of 'The Balancing Act' was at the end of the day as you were packing up and the students had gone, realising that one boy was still there: 'What do we do now Miss?' he asked – I told him it was home time. He just sat there 'I don't want to go' he said. This child was someone who found school (and life) a terrifying and confusing place and often ran away or refused to come in. (Six months later he stopped coming altogether and hid himself away in his house.) That day though, he had worked alongside everyone else, valued and called on to play his part – Richard had got him up to demonstrate something in front of everyone and the Teaching Assistant and I had held our breath, but he had done it. The play spoke to him of a world, which he knew inside and outside himself, a world out of balance, the actor-teachers recognised his voice and did not judge him. His work in class afterwards was transformed.

My students and I will continue to work with you and to support you in any way that we can: you enrich our work and our lives. It is a testament to the incredible quality of your work and the imagination and vision with which you engage young people that you are still here, very much alive and kicking!

Best wishes,

Sorrel

Sorrel Oates
Head of Drama