
**WEST YORKSHIRE
PLAYHOUSE SCHOOLS
TOURING COMPANY**

**21 YEARS OF HIGH QUALITY THEATRE
FOR THE SCHOOLS OF LEEDS**

Produced by
West Yorkshire Playhouse

West Yorkshire Playhouse Schools Touring Company

21 YEARS OF PROVIDING
HIGH QUALITY FREE THEATRE
TO THE **SCHOOLS OF LEEDS**

OFFERING PRODUCTIONS FOR **EARLY**
YEARS, PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND
SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS

TAKING ON SUBJECT MATTER THAT SCHOOLS
MAY FIND DIFFICULT TO INTRODUCE, AND THAT
EXCITES THE MINDS OF CHILDREN

SUPPORTING TEACHERS TO USE
THE THEATRE AS A **STIMULUS FOR LEARNING**
ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

REACHING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WOULD
OTHERWISE **MISS OUT ON THEATRE**

PROVIDING A **GREAT INTRODUCTION** TO
A **DYNAMIC CULTURAL EXPERIENCE**

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
OTHER **CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS**

ALL TO THE **HIGHEST**
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

SUPPORTED AND RESOURCED BY ONE
OF THE COUNTRY'S **LEADING REGIONAL**
PRODUCING THEATRES

Introduction

Since opening in 1990, the Playhouse has been committed to providing a top quality theatre service to schools. In the last five years a total of almost 30,000 pupils in Leeds have seen and taken part in over 800 theatre presentations in schools.

West Yorkshire Playhouse believes it is time to assess and reflect on the work it has toured to schools over the past 21 years and to demonstrate the impact this work has had on both teachers and young people.

West Yorkshire Playhouse is committed to delivering high quality theatre to schools and reaching young people who would otherwise miss out on theatre. A wider knowledge and recognition of the impact of this work is needed. This document looks at what the Playhouse has achieved so far, lessons learnt and how it can continue to deliver this work in the region in the future.

“ *Your work has enriched our pupils' experience of drama and touched their lives – long may it continue.* **”**



The Unique Offer

West Yorkshire Playhouse Schools Touring Company provides a unique offer:

- Reaching young people who might otherwise miss out on the theatre experience
- Working closely with schools
- Supporting the school curriculum
- Working with class-size groups
- Using the highest quality professionals – West Yorkshire Playhouse's national reputation allows it to attract the best
- Exploring new forms of active partnership with teachers
- Developing partnerships with other providers, institutions and agencies
- Presenting new writing and working in different art forms such as music and dance
- Using West Yorkshire Playhouse professionals and resources – designers, educationalists, casting directors, literary managers, theatre technicians and educational resource creators



Track Record

“ Love the fact that you bring theatre to school and not the other way round. ”

CONTINUITY OF SERVICE

The work of the Schools Touring Company has its origins in the establishment of the Leeds Playhouse in 1970. It continued as an integral part of the service when West Yorkshire Playhouse opened in 1990 and has remained a core commitment ever since.

For some young people, theatre in schools will be their only experience of the art form; for others, engagement with the Schools Touring Company is their entry point to main house theatre. For teachers, many of whom become close working partners with the company, the service has become a valued curriculum resource.

INVESTING IN SCHOOLS

The commitment of the Playhouse has been real and substantial over the years. It has allocated core budget to the company and invested the professional expertise of the theatre staff, including design, theatre construction, technical resources, marketing, literary development, casting and box office.

The work of the Schools Touring Company is subject to the same exacting standards by which main house productions are judged. As it is produced and developed by one of the leading regional theatres in England, this has a profound effect on the quality of the product offered to schools.



Track Record

PLAYS TO EXCITE THE MIND

Attracting funding from various sources has enabled the company to create productions for all phases of education – early years, primary and secondary, as well as work designed for pupils with special needs, and for young people who have opted out of education. A review of fifty past productions, while the company has been under the direction of Gail McIntyre, reveals some recurrent characteristics.

Three areas are particularly prominent – most productions include more than one of these characteristics. Productions are never simply ‘about an issue’, but are primarily exciting pieces of theatre in their own right:

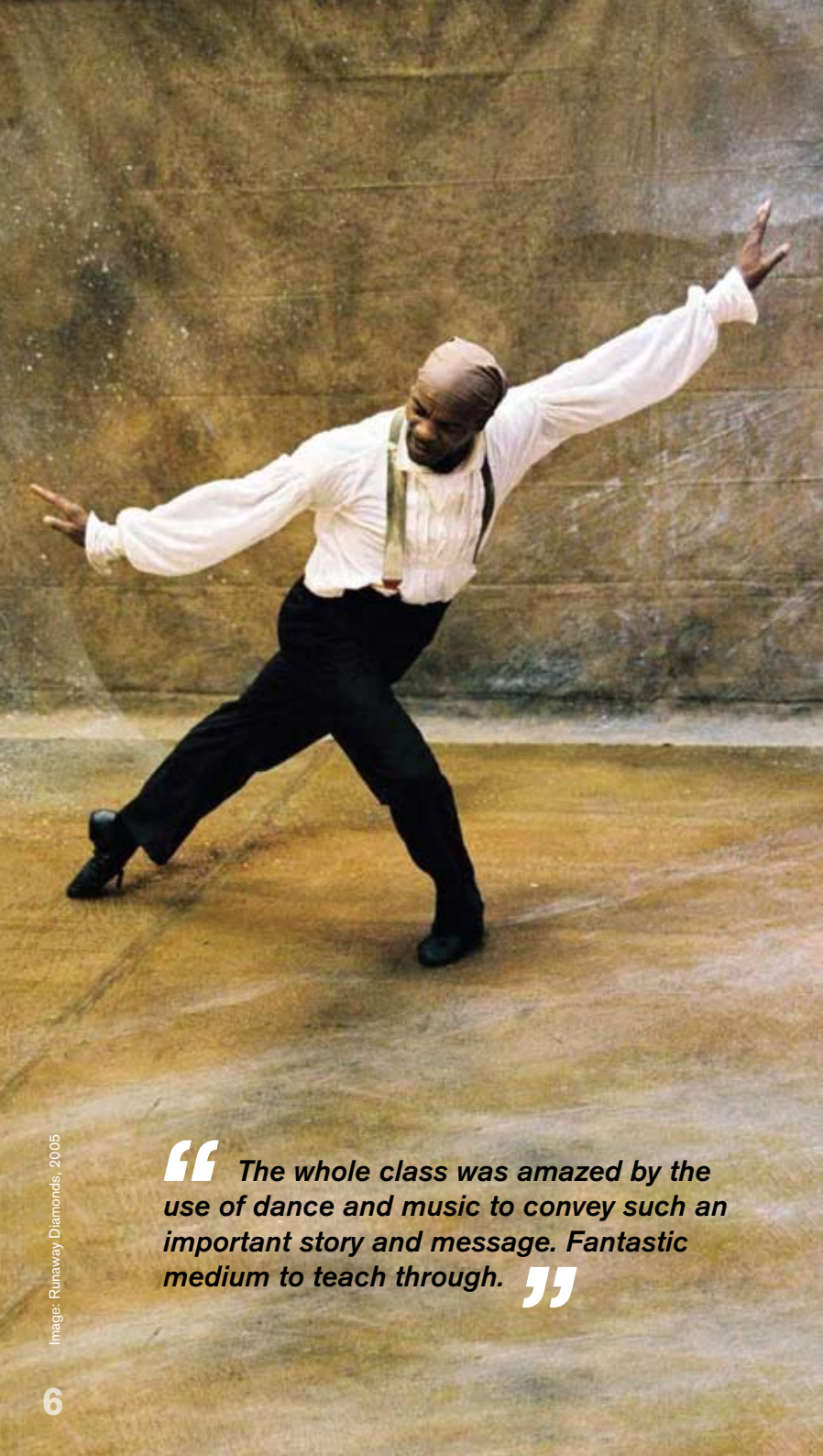
- **MULTICULTURALISM** – dramatic subjects have included refugees and asylum seekers, change in Africa, slavery, Chinese storytelling and the black Crimean nurse Mary Seacole.

Runaway Diamonds

Runaway Diamonds dramatically depicts ‘How a man was made a slave; how a slave was made a man’. Through dance and spoken word it tells the story of Frederick Douglass, born a slave but emerging as one of the great abolitionist leaders.

“During the production they became so engrossed that they responded to questions and comments by the performers as if they were part of the story.”

Teacher, Hillcrest Primary School



“ The whole class was amazed by the use of dance and music to convey such an important story and message. Fantastic medium to teach through. ”



- **SOCIAL ISSUES** – have included the environment, family relationships, bullying, drugs, alcohol, disability and knife crime. Often such projects have involved subject matter that teachers find hard to broach with their pupils. Theatre provides a distancing mechanism that allows pupils to get very close to the issues.

The First Cut

A mother is trying to come to terms with her daughter's crime of knifing a girl in her class. Set at the girl's graveside, it spans issues including peer pressure, the war in Afghanistan, cultural differences and family problems.

"I was overwhelmed by the talents that some of our students have kept secret. Now that the students have found their confidence 'the only way is up'."

Teacher, Parklands' High School now East Leeds Academy



- **THEATRE ARTS** – music and dance feature in many productions, and all of the company's productions have a highly visual style underpinning the verbal ingredient. Classic texts, including Shakespeare, have been the inspiration for some of the new writing that makes up the vast majority of the company's repertoire.

Full of Noises

For some years the Playhouse has offered Shakespeare workshops to schools. Following the very successful Tempest workshops a play was commissioned as a platform for original exploration of plot and character, theme and performance. The play gave an insight into the lives of minor characters Stephano and Trinculo caught up in the seemingly more complex world of their masters.

"Students have been asking to see it again. They were amazed Shakespeare can be funny."

Teacher, Pudsey Grangefield School

Track Record

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

All productions are supported by resources to promote learning opportunities. These resources include:

- Teacher's preparatory workshops, enabling them to prepare themselves and their pupils for the company's visit
- Resource packs – usually created in partnership with practicing teachers – offering ideas and approaches for teachers to derive maximum learning opportunities for their pupils
- Participatory workshop sessions with pupils, often engaging them with the actors immediately after the performance

These approaches all seek to highlight the ways in which productions can support the curriculum in schools. Teachers themselves have valued the contribution to learning in:

- history
- literacy including speaking and listening
- PSHCE including empathy, respect and risk management
- thinking skills
- ITC research work
- dance/PE (especially for boys)
- peer mentoring
- debate
- music

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND ENTITLEMENT

The Schools Touring Company has an ambassadorial role, not only giving pupils access to high quality theatre experiences in schools, but also providing an introduction to the wider programme of work at the theatre. Many young people attend live theatre as a result of their introduction to the art form in school.

The company provides access to learning about all aspects of the theatre experience, as audience, as participants and as students.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnership with other organisations has often proved to be a great way for the company to create learning opportunities.

The Worm Collector

The Worm Collector was one of three original plays about knife crime commissioned by the Royal Armouries in 2008. It toured three times over two years to young people at the top end of Primary/bottom of Secondary over 19 weeks, reaching more than 5,000 young people in Leeds. Additional funding from the Home Office led to an intensive creative investigation of the issues with young people at First Floor, the Playhouse's creative space for young people, using the play as a catalyst.

The Worm Collector tells the story of a young boy who is being bullied. He thinks he should fight his own battles and stand up for himself. He decides to protect himself with a knife. He has no intention of using it. The consequences are disastrous.



Image: The Worm Collector, 2009

Head On

The Home Office sought ways to engage with young people, especially those not in education, employment or training, on the dangers of drug abuse. Six monologues based on real stories from people with different perspectives, all looked at issues of drug misuse. Among them, a mother tells the story of her ordinary family and their struggle with heroin. In another, a young man hooked on 'the best feeling he ever had' reveals his dangerous and ultimately tragic lifestyle. Young people who had been caught up in drugs, or affected by them, worked with the company as peer educators to deliver workshops to accompany the monologues.

"Before, I have always thought of drugs as something that make you physically ill, but I can now see that it affects a person mentally and turns them into a different person."

Student, Bruntcliffe High School

By definition, professional theatre comes at a cost. Up to now, the services of the Schools Touring Company have been paid for through an annual grant from the recently replaced Education Leeds.

As a result of the demise of Education Leeds from March 2012, this grant no longer exists and this quality service to schools is now under threat.

We want to continue to offer inventive and flexible theatre experiences to schools in Leeds and the wider Yorkshire area. However, the changing landscape means that the Schools Touring Company will inevitably have to conduct business differently in the future if it is to continue.

We have commissioned an independent study to explore alternative ways to ensure that the West Yorkshire Playhouse continues to reach the young people of Leeds and beyond.



Conclusion – Where You Come In...

West Yorkshire Playhouse, a registered charity, is a nationally renowned theatre-producing organisation. Its success relies on the quality of its theatre output. The Schools Touring Company generates part of that output and consistently contributes to the high artistic reputation of the organisation.

Our aspiration is to try to find a way to continue and increase this work and to spread its reach further afield. We would like to do this by working with you. We think that together we can find ways to continue to make a positive impact on children and young people's lives into the future, across the region.

What can you do to help?

- Become an advocate for the work – tell people how valuable this work is, talk to governors, politicians, parents and senior teaching staff. Ask them to help us build an awareness of what we may lose
- Share with others what we have achieved and what is possible, and tell them that the service needs support
- Talk to and influence others who could help us to shape a realistic and sustainable new model
- Help direct us to other sources of funding you may know of that will help us to sustain this service
- Help us with practical ideas about how we can continue to offer our work into schools by contacting Gail McIntyre, Sam Perkins or Sheena Wrigley at West Yorkshire Playhouse, details overleaf

“High quality Drama and Theatre Experiences should be made a curriculum and cultural entitlement for every young person.”

Drama, Theatre and Young People – A Manifesto



Get In Touch

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