



Participatory Theatre: The Saviour of Regional Theatre?

A debate hosted by Nottingham Trent University and Nottingham Playhouse at Nottingham Playhouse on Thursday 29th January 2015 at 4.00pm

This event is free to attend but please reserve your place by calling the Box Office on 0115 941 9419.

British Theatre is in the throes of yet another funding crisis. Regional Theatre has been particularly badly hit revealing a disproportionate balance between regional and London funding to the arts of £69 per head in London and only £4.50 in the rest of England. The future of regional theatre looks uncertain. Despite this, some forms of participatory theatre appear to be thriving. Regional Theatres have developed over decades a precious relationship with the community that they perform in. Could a dynamic and participating community be the life blood that regional theatre is searching for?

What is Participatory Theatre?

Participatory Theatre is used to cover practices referred to variously as Applied Theatre or Drama, Community Theatre, Workshop Theatre, Role Play etc. The practice ranges between work with a performance focus to process-based work aimed at personal group and/or social development. It takes place in a wide variety of employment, political, social and community settings and practitioners come from a variety of backgrounds. Practitioners may be professional theatre performers and directors, dedicated trained facilitators, or professionals from other backgrounds e.g. social work or education. Participatory theatre is internationally associated with radical and popular theatre forms such as Theatre in Education, Young People's Theatre, Forum Theatre (Theatre of the Oppressed) and Theatre for Development.

The debate will raise vital questions about the state of regional theatre and its relationship with funding bodies, communities, education and art.

Some of the questions debated by our distinguished panel will be:

- Can theatre interact ethically with marginalised and vulnerable communities?
- How can theatre ensure that community participation is central to the artistic endeavour rather than a tokenistic exercise?
- How does theatre encourage participatory practice as an integral part of society?
- How can theatre measure the social impact of artistic activity?
- How does Higher Education develop participatory practice through research and teaching?
- Should theatre align with non-theatre organisations and funding bodies? What are the ethical concerns of doing this?
- Can theatre and higher education create a new generation of socially responsible artists?

Giles Croft, Artistic Director of Nottingham Playhouse will chair the debate.

The panel

Fiona Buffini, the Nottingham Playhouse Associate Director will join the debate. As a freelance director, Fiona has worked at the Royal Shakespeare Company, National Theatre and in the West End. Fiona also has extensive experience of working with communities in the UK and abroad. Projects include working with Holloway Prison, Clean Break Theatre Company and Orkney Youth Theatre. Through VSO, Fiona had the opportunity to work in Rwanda where she lived and worked with members of the Batwa, Hutu and Tutsi communities devising a drama that challenged racial stereotypes. As well as her directing and community work, she is an experienced teacher, having worked with emerging artists at all the main UK drama schools. Most recently, she designed and ran a course for young directors at The University of Manchester.

Joining the debate is the Artistic Director of Wildworks, Bill Mitchell. Since 2005 he led the company to make; *The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Souterrain*, an international version of the Orpheus myth 2006/7, *The Beautiful Journey*, a telling of Homers *Odyssey* in 2009, the acclaimed *Enchanted Palace* at the request of Kensington Palace 2010 to 2012, *Babel* 2012 and *The Passion of Port Talbot* with Michael Sheen and National Theatre Wales, which won him, in 2011, the TMA Director of the Year award.

Richard Willacy, Associate Artistic Director and Executive Director of Birmingham Opera Company will contribute to the debate. His pioneering work in Birmingham has attracted the attention of people and companies world-wide. Although a small operation, Birmingham Opera Company is now seen to be at the forefront of the modernisation of opera and a pioneer in its development as a 21st century art form. Birmingham Opera work very closely with Volunteers from the Birmingham community to create work.

Also joining us is Cardboard Citizens' Artistic Director Adrian Jackson who founded the company in 1991. Since then he has directed over 20 productions for the company, devising and writing many of them. As well as producing many Forum Theatre pieces, Adrian has also directed all the company's larger-scale site-specific productions, including *Pericles*, co-produced with the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has worked as Augusto Boal's translator on five books *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, *The Rainbow of Desires*, *The Legislative Theatre*, *Hamlet and the Baker's Son* (Boal's autobiography) and *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. He has led workshops with Boal on many occasions, and they collaborated on *The Art of Legislation*, an Artangel-sponsored piece of Legislative Theatre at County Hall in London.