

# Who would miss us?

## **Questioning Youth Theatre, Tania Carlisle and Richard Gaston**

### **Why does youth theatre exist?**

To provide children and young people with positive learning experiences rooted in the arts. Elements of this include:

- a grounding in the discipline, skills, behaviours and techniques needed to pursue a career in the performing arts
- the space to grow as individuals, to gain self-awareness and confidence
- to set and attain standards and achievements that will benefit participants in their future career development whether or not that is within the arts
- the opportunity to meet, share, collaborate with and befriend others from different backgrounds

Youth theatre is vital to the development of the next generation of performers and technicians. It advocates the importance of the arts in society, inspires young people to believe that a career in the arts is possible, and provides a wonderful opportunity to nurture and train the talent of the future. There is also a school of thought that youth theatre is about social development; that the process of young people interacting via the performing arts is as worthwhile as the theatre product itself. While giving young people the opportunity to develop their confidence and interpersonal skills through the arts is obviously beneficial, I do feel there is a lack of clarity within the youth theatre sector as to when this is the main focus/output of their activities as opposed to other instances where the main objective is to find the cream of young emerging talent and encourage them towards a career in the performing arts. The latter objective should surely be the *raison d'être* for youth theatre in receipt of arts funding.

### **Who would miss youth theatre?**

- Children and young people who would like to participate.
- Parents and guardians who would miss the developmental opportunity for their children and wards.
- Teachers and other youth workers who would feel the negative consequences of this missed opportunity for the kids under their care.
- The arts sector as a whole, as Youth Theatre is a vital training ground for future employees.

There is a huge number of young people who have been through either formal or informal youth theatre, either drama or musical theatre, many of whom have gone on to a career in the performing arts. Some have gone into the acting profession, others on the technical side, and still others who now work in arts administration or marketing - all thanks to those early inspiring experiences of youth theatre. All of these people make up our youth theatre alumni and are excellent ambassadors for the impact that it has had on their lives. Even those who did not subsequently enter a career within the arts can still be considered part of the alumni as the experience itself has probably enhanced their creative development and encouraged their general appreciation of and attendance at arts events.

## **What (and who) does youth theatre need to survive and to flourish?**

- Young people who want to participate;
- Skilled and committed leaders;
- Strategic provision of resources;
- to be more integrated within the education system;
- to be valued (and to be seen to be valued) much more widely - lots of evaluation & lots of lobbying!;
- champions at government level;
- effective marketing to future participants;
- regional availability;
- product that balances 'challenging to produce' work and 'easy sell to the public'.

Youth theatre needs to tap into the aforementioned alumni, encourage them to lobby actively for increased support for / appreciation for youth theatre, and become involved themselves in youth theatre projects which will stimulate interest for others to follow in their footsteps. The youth theatre sector itself needs to identify how it can more effectively lobby as one voice as opposed to the disparate group of voices it seems to be at present. It needs to find champions for youth theatre in all sections of society - an Arts Council officer who themselves came up through the ranks of youth theatre? Or a recognisable media personality? Or an influential business person with a background in youth theatre who could leverage business support through their network of contacts. If youth theatre wants to flourish, it needs to take a professional approach to stakeholder management at all levels.

## **Who can help us, and how?**

- Past members - donations of £ and time, as well as advocacy
- 'professional' theatre practitioners as mentors or by establishing more formal, linkages/apprenticeships

## **How should youth theatre go about telling others that it's important?**

- with facts and reasoned, concise argument to back up the case. Never ever only with a 'we're really worthy and you have to support us' argument - you have to positively prove what you deliver and how your activities bring about (measured) positive outcomes.
- with case studies - it's an exciting and dynamic medium that speaks for itself.
- with 'celebrity' and VIP alumni fronting a strategic and sustained campaign.
- always with a positive tone - no whinging, no whining!

## **How can youth theatre turn this process into financial support?**

See previous answer. If the right argument is made, then the £ will follow.

*Tania Carlisle and Richard Gaston, Arts and Business (NI).*

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