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The Magazine for Drama & Theatre at York St John University

Issue 11 Autumn 2015



SPECIAL ALUMNI EDITION

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Theatre Pages

Issue N° 11 • Autumn 2015

Special Alumni Issue

Edited by Jules Dorey Richmond & Nathan Walker

Student Editor Janice Newton

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Cover & Background Image by David Powley 1976

Production of 'The Insect' at York St John

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to welcome you to the 11th edition of *Theatre Pages*, a special issue entirely dedicated to York St John theatre graduates.

We are but part of a long history of theatre at YSJU, and to discover more I spoke to David Powley, course leader for Drama, Film and Television from 1979-91. David told me drama began here in embryonic form in 1967 as part of the English Department, when Margaret Jowett was brought in from Bretton Hall to lead on it.

Between 1968-74 drama & theatre led a nomadic existence, offering modules to English, Music and Science majors on teacher training courses. During this time Create Theatre, an extra-curricular and collaborative workshop group, produced vibrant theatre experiences, which included touring classic texts as well as staff and student authored works to schools, pubs and villages throughout Yorkshire. Over the subsequent 48-and-counting years, drama & theatre has had many incarnations as evidenced by our contributors, who have studied the subject under numerous degree titles. This year we are proud to launch a new suit of degrees: *Drama & Theatre*; *Drama: Community & Education*; and *Drama & Dance*, which are the latest in a long history of innovation at what one of our alumni describes as ‘this quietly brilliant university’.*

When we first conceived of this alumni edition, we were curious to discover more about the diversity of experiences that our theatre graduates go on to have; how they remember their time here; the pathways from graduation to employment; and what advice they might have for the next generation of graduates.

As we received each submission we discovered stories from across three decades of alumni with highly successful and versatile careers, generosity of spirit and with a genuine warmth and appreciation for the time spent studying here. Represented are stories from theatre practitioners, actors, directors, set designers, sound designers, executive directors, youth theatre workers, community facilitators, live artists, activists, teachers, and PhD students (pause for breath) whose work is having real impact on the world around them. Reading them is a reminder of the value and benefits that theatre and arts degrees have, both of the individual students themselves and for the rest of society. A big thank you to all those who contributed.

Happy reading,

Jules Dorey Richmond
Senior Lecturer in Performance

* Gemma Allred (page 5)

On Learning How to be Human: I remember in the first term being introduced to all these new ideas, with articles about Duchamp, Beuys and Kaprow. I was being asked to think for myself, to make art for myself and it was a real challenge, I remember at the time being so excited by this new world that I hadn't even known existed. I had wanted to act, but now I had my eyes opened to the greater possibility of performance.

My time at YSJ informs my every decision as a community artist, and gave me the basic lessons I needed to understand how to work with people who have often experienced significant trauma. When I work with people with mental health problems, or addiction issues, I am simply applying the lessons I learnt for myself with Jules in 'Performing the Self', or with David when we stood in Auschwitz, and then later when we stood in the studio in 'Artist as Witness'. The power of understanding how to make an idea turn into a reality, the alchemic process of "creating something from nothing".

Once you understand what this means, and its something that can only really be understood through doing, by experiencing it from start to finish, then you can begin to have faith in process, any process.

You begin to understand that however you look at it, in one day, two weeks, six months there will be something. That may be a show, a festival, a film, a book, whatever, as long as you follow the simple logic that if you turn up, make a plan, make mistakes, take wrong turns, try and try again, commit and even submit to, but ultimately trust in the process, then something wonderful will happen. Even if it's not the sort of wonderful you'd imagined at the start.

I was fortunate enough to put an idea from my undergraduate studies into 'real world' practice, working with Nick Rowe to co-found and develop Converge, which was the first real testing ground for much of what I have discussed above. I was artistic director of Out of Character theatre company for several years, and in many ways they taught me just as much as my degree had done, especially these three important lessons:

1. Assume nothing;
2. Community theatre is 'real' theatre;
3. Stanislavski (traditional theatre) and Forced Entertainment (contemporary theatre) are not enemies but best friends.

Community theatre is how I make my living, I am one of the fortunate few, and even then the pay is not brilliant and its incredibly hard work. But I enjoy my job, and that is very hard thing to put a value on.

The language of theatre fascinates me, and I see it as a sort of democratising force, a way of communicating across cultures and experiences, a language, a

GRADUATED 2008 & MA 2012

way of playing, which also has the power to create meaningful relationships and promote personal healing.

I am about to begin a new chapter at Salisbury Playhouse, as their Community Director. This is a new role for the theatre, and in many respects will mark a whole new way of working for me too. But I know with certainty that if I am in any doubt about what to do in the face of these new challenges, I will simply cast my mind back to the lessons of York St. John, and find an answer.

As I draw this account to a close, I'd like to offer one piece of advice to anyone starting out studying theatre at this quietly brilliant university:

Go and see some community theatre;
Go and hear real people express their real lives, in new and beautiful ways;
Go and observe as friends and family are absorbed by the events onstage;
Go and taste what it means when the young woman who could barely speak six months ago, eloquently delivers a poem from her heart to her peers;
Go and understand that when the set's a bit wonky, or people read from a piece of paper its part of the performance, not the problem with it;
Go and be with others as they give the authentic gift of themselves on stage;
Go and witness;
Go and feel what it means to connect with another through theatre;
Go and be human.



NICOLETTE HOBSON

I am often asked by young people how I got into the arts and became a drama practitioner. In all honesty it was quite a bit of luck, being in the right place and the right time and most importantly a lot of hard work and dedication. As I look back on the past two decades since I left Ripon and York St. John (as it was formally known) I can see the significance of the opportunities that came my way, the people I met on the journey and the doors that opened.

My degree majored in drama and minored in art, so at the start of my career I didn't go straight into drama and education. I focused on my love for art and established my own greeting card company, The Fig Tree which I ran for a couple of years. I then got married and had two children, but the passion for drama and performance never left me. It was through my children growing up that I got involved in school life and started to run drama workshops and set up a drama club. I then meet with the drama consultant for the City of York Council, Colin Jackson, and began my career as a freelance drama practitioner delivering workshops in primary schools across York. I then started working for York Theatre Royal's youth theatre where I met Jenna Drury. In 2010 we decided to set up our own theatre in education company called Mud Pie Arts. Mud Pie is all about getting stuck in, with the emphasis based on the empowerment of children, to create an instantaneous style of theatre and play. The "Pie" representing participation, interaction and education. We now deliver a wide variety of drama workshops and performances for children aged from 2-16 years in a range of settings from nurseries to historic houses and of course, schools. Alongside this I also work part-time for York Theatre Royal as their education associate. The next year brings lots of exciting new projects, we are touring a show in the Spring called *Enchanting Chalk* with Rural Arts and entering our second year of our partnership with York Explore Libraries.

So if you are planning on a career in the arts, take every opportunity that comes your way, work hard and enjoy the journey.

GRADUATED 1994



JONATHAN KENNEDY

With the benefit of hindsight, 20+ years on, I'm struck at how my undergraduate years at York St John have shaped my career. I remember vividly performing in Liz Lockhead's poetic take on Dracula in the Chapel, alongside some of the challenging lecturers, John McGrath's 7:84 and the agit-prop companies of the '60s set against the epic sweep of a semester of Greek tragedy and comedy. My internship in the marketing department at the Liverpool Playhouse, which at the time was undergoing a major financial crisis at the tail end of the 1980's recession, is another standout memory.

After graduating I spent a decade at Wimbledon Theatre, South London, navigating my way through the machinations of the commercial touring theatre as Head of Studio and Programme Development. I was enabled to produce new work in the studio, matched against the commercial world of the 'showbiz' main-house and 1,600 tickets to sell each night in the Edwardian auditoria. I helped establish the studio of Wimbledon Theatre as an engine of new work on the London-fringe.

An invitation to apply for the post of Head of Arts Programmes at the Croydon Clocktower came out of the blue. A large local authority arts centre, the venue offered a wider canvass to create and produce including the delightful David Lean cinema, galleries and performance spaces. After the modest budgets of Wimbledon Theatre I was faced with a new sense of responsibility, a staff of circa 35 and a significant and complex arts centre to run.

For the past 7 years I've been Executive Director at Tara Arts, founded in 1977, the first and foremost cross-cultural theatre company in the country. A company with 7 dedicated staff, its own theatre in Wandsworth and an enviable reputation for touring the classics and new work internationally.

With Tara Arts visionary artistic director and co-founder Jatinder Verma, we've been able ride funding cuts and continue to grow. Leading the way for many established and emerging Black and Asian actors, directors and companies. Through tenacity, strategic thinking and hard graft we've been able to blaze a trail, which brings us to the current – and the dramatic expansion of the company's theatre as a national centre for cross-cultural theatre. Due to reopen at the end of 2015 we have secured a £2.5 million capital redevelopment. The transformation will enable future generations to create, produce, and tour out of the theatre.

An unintended consequence of my work at Tara Arts has been regular gigs as guest lecturer at Birkbeck, South Bank and Goldsmiths in London, so that 20 years on I find myself on the opposite side of the lecture theatre. With enduring memories of my time studying at YSJ to the fore I'm reminded how far I've come and how important my student years were.

GRADUATED 1991



SIAN DERRY



GRADUATED 2007

I left York St Johns in 2007 after 3 amazing years studying Performance Theatre. Whilst at St Johns I was given many fantastic opportunities to work with young people in many different capacities, which confirmed my decision to go into teaching.

After graduating I went to Aberystwyth University to complete a PGCE in Drama. I obtained my first teaching post in 2008 at South Hunsley School where I am now Head of Drama, a role, which I adore. Whilst at the school I have been presented with so many opportunities. I have played a significant role in the leadership and development of the extra-curricular provisions. All of my lunchtimes and most of my evenings are filled with extra-curricular opportunities for the students. My most successful achievements in this area have been my direction and co ordination of the whole school musicals. My passion and enthusiasm for the Shakespeare Schools Festival, which we participate in annually, has earned the school a highly respected reputation within the East Riding.

As part of my professional development I work with drama students at the school to help and support staff training. I currently promoted the use of forum theatre to establish effective peer-to-peer mentoring in the classroom. The skills acquired at St John's have also been used effectively to support the Initial Teacher Training students at the school; using role play and forum theatre to explore effective classroom management. I also run a training session at the school for ITTs, NQTs and new starters focusing on classroom presence and voice projection. This is an amazing opportunity which I am able to deliver not only within South Hunsley but also through school-to-school support. In this role of school-to-school support I was an active member of staff training within other schools, delivering training sessions on how to deliver an outstanding lesson, how to facilitate effective team work and how to develop classroom presence. Last year I was invited to the SSAT National conference in London as a keynote speaker to talk about my leadership of Cross Curricular Creativity. I am also a teacher governor at the school; I take my role very seriously ensuring I have a strong understanding of the whole school needs and developments.

I am extremely passionate about my subject, the delivery of drama across the curriculum and the young people I teach. I owe a big part of this to the course at York St John's for inspiring me to pursue my career in teaching and equipping me with the skills and abilities to do so.

MATTHEW HARPER

Over the past 5 years I've worked as a freelance theatre practitioner, as which I have directed performances, penned scripts for companies, coached young actors, tutored at universities and facilitated countless workshops, which is why I find it so difficult to neatly describe what I do, and why I have actively sought to diversify. There's a lot to be said for persistence, believing in your own abilities and saying 'yes' to opportunities that come your way.

Third years, remember that ethos when you are having that 'what do I do now moment of panic' in May.

Youth Theatre is a large part of my work, but when I was graduating it was at the bottom of my 'wish-list' of career paths. My first job offer (after my own 'what do I do now moment of panic') was to teach drama and acting as part of a weekend performing arts school with young people, which I did for four-years. This experience re-connected me with my own background in youth theatre, which I remembered as a safe environment for creative expression, empowerment, diversity, friendship, and where my love of theatre began.

I can honestly say that some of the best, most rewarding work I have made has been with a youth cast both as Artistic Director of Upstage Centre Youth Theatre in York and as a freelance youth theatre practitioner for York Theatre Royal, where I have had the freedom and pleasure to work with young people, directing musicals, plays, site-specific pieces, devised projects, and facilitating intense training courses for young people aged 6-21.

I also write, direct and act and am an associate artist of Six Lips Theatre, an independent theatre company that produce original, hand crafted, immersive productions, our most recent work experienced a successful run at the Edinburgh Fringe 2014.

For the past three years I have been Artistic Director of Once Seen Theatre Company, for adult actors with learning difficulties. Together we have created a historical promenade performance and a re-imagining of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Working for Once Seen has strengthened a key element of my practice.

I have also set-up my own company, Next Door But One, a community arts collective specialising in playback theatre, an improvised form of theatre in which the content comes from stories given by audience members. Playback offers individuals an opportunity to witness their story from an outside perspective and to share/discuss it with others without the onus being on them. It is a wonderful way of promoting community cohesion and healthy relationships. With Next Door But One I have met some of the most inspiring people, with astonishing and humbling stories; we know we have executed a session well when we have



photo by Andrew Dyer

feedback such as ‘ I don’t know how you did that’ or ‘I’ve never thought about my story like that, thank you’.

Recently I have taken on a new venture, stepping back into the world of academia, lecturing at YSJU, as well as utilising the knowledge and experience I have to work on the Introduction to Performance thread of Converge.

So, even though what I do doesn’t really fit nicely into an easily digestible job title, it works for me. I get to work on what I am passionate about, with each different component strengthening my practice – I suppose it’s what you call being a theatre maker.

PAULA CLARK

I have worked at York Theatre Royal in various roles since graduating from YSJ in 2005, as well as working as a freelance practitioner, director and performer and completing an MA in Performance at YSJ in 2012. Despite my desire to make and write theatre to perform, I keep finding myself drawn back to working with young people which I am extremely passionate about, in particular young people who are marginalised or socially excluded or for some reason have not had the opportunity to get involved in theatre. It is my firm opinion that access to theatre can be a game changer to the lives of young people, especially those feeling disenfranchised or those who need to explore their place in the world. Every child and young person should have the right to a safe place in which to explore who they are and express themselves creatively. Theatre is a powerful tool for the empowerment of young people and it should not only be available to the lucky few.

In my current role as Creative Skills Promoter at York Theatre Royal (YTR), I work to make sure that all young people are able to engage with us whatever their circumstances: through outreach and community engagement; by providing meaningful and exciting work experience and placements; and by the coordination of the annual TakeOver festival at YTR.

TakeOver is a week-long festival that is entirely programmed, organised and delivered by a team of young people aged 12-26, who make all the decisions and take on all the jobs whilst being supported by YTR staff and mentors. It is a hugely enabling and empowering initiative for the participants who are given total responsibility for the event and are able to work with peers towards a real life end product that will contribute to the York Theatre Royal programme. For TakeOver 14 the team delivered an exciting, inventive week, jam packed with dance, comedy, theatre and music, including brand new work by emerging artists that you would never normally see at York Theatre Royal. One example being the local performance arts collective SLAP, for the first ever Pay What You Think evening of work at the theatre. YTR really values the insight and innovation that each new TakeOver Team bring to the building and look forward with excitement and anticipation to TakeOver 15.

If you would like to find out more about TakeOver and other creative opportunities at York Theatre Royal you can sign up for our Creative Opportunities updates by emailing creative.skills@yorktheatreroyal.co.uk
Follow us on twitter: @CreativesYTR

GRADUATED 2005 & MA 2012



ELIZABETH WHYNES

I graduated in 2014 and decided to stay on in York, where I work as a freelance theatre maker and practitioner.

My three years at York St John were challenging but extremely rewarding, I learnt a great deal about the world and myself, I met some wonderful people, who will be my friends for life. One of the best things about studying at York St John is that it is a hub of creativity, which is something I took for granted but miss now I am living in the 'real world'.

Since graduating I have been working in a number of different creative roles as artist/practitioner/facilitator. I am a freelance workshop leader for Konflux Theatre in Education; going into schools, nationwide, to facilitate Play-in-a-Day workshops from KS1-KS4 on a variety of different topics from history to anti-bullying. I also work as a youth theatre practitioner at York Theatre Royal and artistic director of TakeOver (2015-16). I love what I do and it's really rewarding. I am also an arts award activist for the magazine Arts Award Voice, aimed at people under the age of 26. I write articles and interviews for the magazine, representing Yorkshire in national events and conferences and curate events to help profile the arts, helping make them more accessible to this age group throughout the Yorkshire region.

In my last year at university I was lucky enough to win the York Theatre Royal Graduate Prize, and I am still under mentorship from the Creative and Artistic directors, Damien Crudden and Juliette Foster, whom I touch base with from time to time. I am currently devising new pieces of work, both solo and collaboratively with a number of artists, which I aim to perform later in the year.

My advice to the next generation of graduates: I have learnt that things take time to happen, but success will happen... in time. You may need that barista or bar job for a few years straight after university, but use that time to continuously develop your art. It's *your* art; no one else can make it like you can. Trust in it and most importantly trust and believe in yourself.

GRADUATED 2014



Elizabeth Whynes photo by Jen Todmann

CHRISTOPHER MOLLON



GRADUATED 2010

A conversation between two graduates, Nathan Walker & Christopher Mollon, who have both developed contemporary performance within a visual art context and have presented performances internationally at festivals and galleries.

Nathan: So Chris, what do you do? And, more importantly, how did you start doing it after your degree?

Chris: I am a performance artist primarily but over the last four years, since graduating, my artistic practice has branched out across different mediums. The performance 'making' has obviously stemmed from studying at York St John and this foundation supports the performances I make. After I completed my degree, I walked from St. Bees (Cumbria) to my family home in Ravenscar (North Yorkshire). This was a twelve-day 'Coast to Coast' walk of the North of England. I realised that, through walking, I was developing ideas for performances in the different landscapes I was encountering. This was a liberating experience as I was beginning to realise that my practice could be site-specific and respond to the landscapes and activities of the locations I inhabit. Four years on, I now make durational performances in a range of contexts that reference walking, the etymology of place-names and use found objects and sculpture. I'm fortunate enough to have presented my work in galleries and festivals nationally and internationally.

I'm interested if your route to performance art was similar to mine and how you arrived at your practice once you graduated?

Nathan: Yes, it was similar as I was fortunate enough to study at York St John and was introduced to alternative performance that sit on the margins between theatre and art. Whilst studying I had opportunities to make solo performances, and I was given permission to think of myself not only as a student (when are we not students?) but as an artist. I developed an interest in writing poetry and was encouraged to write for performance and make my own work. When graduating my tutors Jules Dorey Richmond and David Richmond nominated my work for an emerging artists platform at the National Review of Live Art (2007) in Glasgow which was really important for me. Whilst there I saw work by a range of artists that I had admired and studied including Anne Seagrave and Black Market International and this influenced the way I thought about my own work and ultimately its direction. Nine years later I have just presented a durational performance at Experimentica Festival at Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff which was an important moment in my practice. I was able to bring together my interests in language and performance action to make performance that lasted eight hours. I have always been interested in performance writing and my practice now considers the relationship between performance art and poetry, so much so that it has become the topic for my PhD!

NATHAN WALKER

I think that having a background in theatre has provided me with a broad range of interests and references and so I think I'm naturally drawn to interdisciplinary practices, would you agree?

Chris: Having a background in theatre has enabled me to communicate my practice emotionally and artistically. Studying theatre allowed me to develop my social skills by mixing with people from different social and economic backgrounds. This now transmits through my confidence in the ability of describing my practice to people however academic or non-academic they are. As I now make performances on my own, these dialogues are important in aiding the development of my practice. Subconsciously, I continually reference my theatre background in my work.

Nathan: I think that's really interesting and would argue that the history of theatre is as influential and important to the development of performance art as any other art form. I think what's really vital is that no matter what we call it, in the end, we are all driven to make live performance. Is there a moment during your degree that you remember experiencing different kinds of practices, performance art, live art, installation or something else for the first time?

Chris: I remember in my final year at York St John I watched a documentary about the performance art collective Black Market International and the penny dropped! Its funny, recently I presented a new durational performance at the Künstlerforum in Bonn, Germany, as part of PAErsche, a performance art collective that includes Boris Nieslony from Black Market International so in a way I've come full circle. I also remember there was a trip to the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow (2010). I know you have already mentioned your experience of this and mine was similarly life-changing: I started to see that all things, however mundane, could be seen as performance. By witnessing works by artists such as Alastair MacLennan and Michael Mayhew, I began to understand the work I wanted to make. I began to understand the importance of durational performance on a deeply personal level and from an audience perspective as well.

Nathan: It seems to me that the opportunities to experience new kinds of practice alongside an intense period of studying the history and theory of performance enabled me to see the relationships between these things. I don't think you get that opportunity anywhere but at University, and especially in the Theatre Department at York St John.

Chris: Absolutely!

GRADUATED 2006

Nathan Walker NAFE (2014) Photo by Marco Berardi



JANE ALLANACH

I had no idea what the BA Performance course would be about, but went because of my love of performance and my need to do something stimulating as my youngest child was about to start primary school.

I don't regret a single moment, even though on day one, as I listened to everyone name drop about Brecht and Stanislavski, I felt incredibly out of my depth having never studied drama even at GCSE level (actually O level!). Anyway, to cut a long story short, I raided the library for everything I could get my hands on, eagerly attended lectures and hung on every word. My eyes were opened to 'the world' even though I'd experienced it for 37 years already – with some of that time spent as an army nurse in the first Gulf War. I suppose I'm saying that I'd lived a bit, but going to York St John made me ask questions about a lot of things, particularly how the world is put together. I'd always been into gender equality but YSJ made me think about the politics of it even more, along with identity and what makes us who we are. I did indeed explore much of this through various performances, and feel so much richer for that experience.

I currently work in a primary school as a teaching assistant. It is a job that uses all of my life experience, as well as that of my degree. I teach literacy and maths but I also engage with the children creatively through obvious ways such as assemblies and school productions, and less obvious avenues where they are probably not even aware of the teaching: I'm always keen to get gender politics into the learning – especially in the staffroom where I've tried, and nearly succeeded, in banning the phrase 'man-up' (and let me tell you, it's the young female teachers that are the worse).

So that's my day job, but since leaving YSJ I've been working alongside Out of Character, a theatre company comprising of mental health service users. As well as this I have performed and directed on and off since 2010. One of the highlights has been working with Red Ladder, a Leeds based theatre company with whom I've trained and performed. My most recent performance was with an emerging writer called Matthew Wignall, who'd been John the Baptist to my Mother Mary in the 2012 York Mystery Plays. His play, *The Five Seasons*, was produced by his newly formed company Off the Rock Productions. It was a great stimulating opportunity – an absurd challenging piece. That's the type of work I enjoy doing most.

So in the four years since I left YSJ I can't claim to be a professional actor or a freelance successful performance artist, but that was never my intention. I actually never gave it much thought where going to university might take me, and the truth is I might still be working in my local school even if I hadn't gone. However my mind is altered – expanded and open is the only way I can describe it. And I know for sure I wouldn't have met all of the wonderful thought provoking people that I have done, as one door after another has opened, and will no doubt continue to do so. As David Richmond once said to me, 'Once the door has been opened, we are honour bound to go through it'.

GRADUATED 2010

Jane Allnach in York Mystery Plays, Photo by John R Saunders



WINOJITH SANJEEWA



On completing a BA in South Asian Dance and Drama in Sri Lanka with a First class pass, I worked for two prestigious universities in the country before moving to the UK in order to complete my postgraduate studies. In the UK, I set up dance classes teaching a form of Indian classical dance, Sri Lankan dance and Bollywood dance in York.

I was attracted to the MA in Applied Theatre at York St John University owing to its relevance to practicing artists and I completed the masters in 2010.

Over the last two consecutive years, I have directed and choreographed two South Asian dance shows at York St John University and at York Theatre Royal respectively. These spectacular performances occurred as a result of the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) project of York St John University employing me as a visiting lecturer in South Asian dance to teach BAME communities in York and Bradford. I have trained over fifty students, who displayed astonishing discipline, poise, skill and talent and brought to stage the splendor, colour, and distinct flavour of Sri Lankan and Indian dance to packed audiences.

Whilst continuing to teach dance on a freelance basis, I am currently studying for a PhD at York St John University in Performing Arts and Religious Studies.

ADAM FOSTER, HAMISH PIRIE & HELEN ATKINSON

Hamish Pirie, Helen Atkinson and myself Adam Foster, graduated from York St John in 2003. We all studied Theatre, Film and Television. After spending the summer of our graduation at the Edinburgh Festival, where we had devised a piece called *Only Hope*, we moved to London bright eyed and determined to forge careers in the precarious world of theatre. That was nearly 12 years ago. York is a special place for us all and helped to carve out our spirit of collaboration and artistic taste. After training as a postgraduate at Mountview I have been working as an actor, most recently for the National Theatre on *War Horse* which I toured across the UK, Ireland and South Africa. When asked to write a few words for Theatre Pages I asked Hamish and Helen to also explain what they are currently working on.

Hamish Pirie answered, “I am currently associate director of the Royal Court Theatre in London. This means I direct plays, develop writers and emerging artists while contributing to and supporting the vision of the artist director, Vicky Featherstone. My interest has always been in new plays since raiding the library at York St John. For me the thrill of delivering the voice of an artist who is responding to the world we all share is the ultimate honour. It makes sense to me that it’s art with a purpose. I have just opened *Violence and Sons* by Gary Owen, who wrote the first modern play I read at college *Crazy Gary’s Mobile Disco* so it felt particularly special.”

Helen Atkinson is now an award winning sound designer. She started working in technical theatre, which she had specialised in at YSJ, firstly at Theatre Royal Stratford East in London as an assistant lighting and sound technician. She talked to me about her journey thus far.

“Stratford threw me on the sound desk to mix the pantomime, and I loved it! Since then, I’ve worked in house as part of a sound department at Regents Park Open Air Theatre & the National Theatre. I’ve been a production engineer in the London’s West End and UK touring, and I’ve worked all over the world as a touring sound engineer, with companies such as Cheek By Jowl and Complicite. I’m now making a crust as a Theatre Sound Designer and this last year designed my first show at the National Theatre - *Ballyturk* in the Lyttelton, for which I won the Irish Times Theatre Award for Best Sound Design 2014.”

A career in theatre is something we all felt we had to pursue. The confidence to do this was instilled in us through the staff and our peers at York St John. We were lucky to form relationships and most importantly to learn that in a career that can often feel lonely, collaboration is key. Helen best sums this up when I asked her what she might say to a graduate heading into this world: “What matters is go out there and work hard, make sacrifices, make a good impression and good friends. Work feeds getting more work. Oh and you need luck. Lots of it.”

GRADUATED 2003

Adam Foster in rehearsals



ELANOR STANNAGE

Looking back at my journey from undergraduate to PhD Student, I am thinking about what got me from there to here...

The first thing was a knock back. I was on the cusp of graduating, after focussing on community theatre and performance, with interests in mental health. I thought the best and sensible option was to do a fast track Occupational Therapy course, integrate my theatre practice into my OT practice once I was working, then maybe study drama-therapy in the future. But they knocked me back. I remember walking home crying and thinking, 'Well I'll just have to try being a freelance community theatre practitioner.' By the time I got home I had made my decision and was making plans for my new path.

Firstly I got a day job, one that would be flexible with my working hours. Next I contacted local theatre companies working with theatre and mental health to see if I could visit them. One replied, inviting me to watch a rehearsal of their new show. I began to volunteer with them, after a while they saw that I had some potential and began to pay me to run sessions. I applied for other freelance work and got bits here and there, over the next two years I got more and more work and cut my hours until the day I could quit the coffee shop and be a full time freelance theatre practitioner — what a day that was!

During that time of relative freedom I also made some performance work with a close friend from my undergraduate course: we had nothing to lose, both at the beginning of our career, and York St John let us use empty spaces in the evening to workshop and rehearse our work. We toured a little and even got paid to perform. I'm so grateful for that time of collaboration and experimentation, thriving from the confidence of graduating.

So I was doing a job I loved, working hard and making work I was proud of. I learnt so much on the job, particularly in my role as director of 1 in 4 Theatre Company where I coordinated everything from making the tea to fundraising, running workshops, writing and directing productions. It was a wonderful time when there was a lot of funding around if you knew how to apply for it.

Then the austerity measures came in and 1 in 4 was one of the first casualties. I also took some time off to have a baby and found the climate of cuts very tough as a freelancer when I returned to work. Then, feeling a bit disillusioned and ready for a new challenge, a PhD studentship in Arts in Mental Health was advertised at York St John, I applied and here I am 18 months later in the midst of the toughest and most interesting work ever.

So I am grateful for collaboration; for the challenges; for those almighty knock-backs because they have contributed to my journey from there to here but a key principle, if I was to whittle it down has been to hone my instincts, and to trust them.

Relational
Risk-taking



Elanor Stannage Photo by James Drury



AMY NORRIS



[Verb] Arts *A Mother's Trace* (2014) photo by Nathan Walker

When I look back over my time at YSJ I am overcome with the personal and professional transformation that has occurred in my life. My theatre degree was without doubt the making of me, my character, my drive, my aspirations, my outlook, my life-long friends, my morals and my husband!

I now work as the Student Residences Officer for YSJ Accommodation and would not have been considered for this role without the experience I gained on my degree. I also work as a freelance Creative Producer and Director and have co-founded [verb] arts initiative, which is a creative platform for emerging artists. Last year myself and partner James were honoured to be asked to perform at the YSJ Performing House and this was a very rewarding experience, being able to use this professional platform to showcase our work to the wider community. It is easy to get used to praise on a course where you perform to lecturers, family and friends, so this was a real honest opportunity to showcase our work and our new company to members of the public. We are currently applying for an Arts Council grant to carry on this work, which is incredibly exciting!

The theatre degree is an opportunity to really get your teeth into what it feels like to be an artist. A transition occurs towards the end of the second year (usually after a total crisis stage where you never want to make theatre or art ever again...) and you finally feel like you want to make art and ultimately make a difference with your work. I had a number of challenges in my third year and a diagnosis of Crohn's disease resulted in two major operations in term time! I see this struggle as a mini performance, as a chance to make art in a challenging environment; something I now recognise as what we are faced with every time we make a new piece of work. Everyone can come out of this degree and start their own company, tour their own show, showcase their own work, work in a totally new environment and sometimes we just need the confidence to make the first step. Be a [verb] and start doing!

A Movement Artist. Based in rural Wales for the last 20 years, my works respond to circumstance through movement and image and may manifest as solo actions, walks or social choreographies, often working with the public, other artists, animals and places.

Following an extended period of working away on commissions and residencies internationally. I have recently reoriented my creative activity back to the rural area in which I live. It is my hope that this 'homecoming' will actually be a means to expand my practice, to sustain different creative outcomes and to foster an ongoing engagement with my village, valley and wider community.

Emerging out of this time are 2 new projects: a solo, Studies for Maynard, a meditation on issues of what it might mean to exist at home in a manner that is both cosmopolitan and ecological. And this ecology is not simply concerned with nature, but with how we exist emotionally and politically as human beings together. The central object is a table that is moved, manipulated and inhabited in a series of studies and drawings made with the body. We are also developing a biennial dance and performance festival, Maynard, here in the small rural village of Abercych, Pembrokeshire. A festival where artists and public engage in dialogue and camaraderie within a programme of dance performances, films, workshops, food and social dancing.

In hindsight, my time at York St John in the early eighties provided the beginnings of an interdisciplinary practice. Studying Geography and Human Movement led to early exposure to Judson, experimentalists, and geographical ideas of place. And later, to the belief that a creative practice is a worthwhile thing, with a place in the wider World. York St. John was a formative time and kindled an early interest in the connections between dancing and locatedness. Forms of thinking and being that continue to preoccupy me today.

GRADUATED 1984

Simon Whitehead Table Land (1998) photo by Martin Roberts



MELLY STILL

I can still remember my first day at York St John, back in September 1981. I was met by a kind 2nd year student, one of several volunteering to escort hesitant freshers to their halls of residence. He was called Simon Whitehead, a name I come across from time to time as he's now a brilliant international movement artist. I can even remember what I was wearing — sort of vintage new romantic (more accurately a billowing Victorian nighty) — but I won't go on about that now, I only mention it to demonstrate the vivid memories I have of my time at St Johns.

At the time of applying in 1979/80, St Johns was the only place in the UK that offered the possibility of studying the three subjects I was enthusiastic about: Dance, Theatre and Art. I was fortunate enough to study under generous tutors: memorably, David Haines, Tom Spencer, Bill Pinner, Stuart Martin, Finlay Coupar. *No women*. Seems incredible when I think of that now but I didn't even notice it at the time. Were there any women tutors? There must have been but... Anyway I'm grateful that the tutors in their different ways embraced mistake making. I made many. And although I may have been effusive at times — certainly about the work, or rather making work — I recall being difficult and resistant as well. To my great surprise no one gave me a hard time — I think I was pretty much left to sort out any foolery and learn from it as and when I was ready. Most seminally I was introduced to the work of Pina Bausch, probably in 1982 or 83, and allowed to create some monstrous pieces of dance in response. I cringe at the memory. Nevertheless I carried on in a haphazard way, involving myself on the fringes of the world of dance, theatre and visual art.

And now, exactly 30 years later, probably almost to the day of handing in a woeful dissertation, I'm lucky enough to be developing some exciting work as a theatre practitioner with some extraordinary companies.

I worked as a director, choreographer, designer and adaptor for many companies including the National Theatre, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Bristol Old Vic, Hampstead Theatre, The Manchester Royal Exchange and the Young Vic. I have been nominated for Olivier and Tony awards (best director and best design). My work has travelled throughout the UK, Europe, Scandinavia, the Far East, US and Broadway.

I live in London with my partner and three children.

GRADUATED 1985



Melly Still photo by Catherine Ashmore

MADELINE IRWIN

I look back on my time at YSJ incredibly fondly. We were the first cohort of students to undertake the BA Hons in Film, TV, Literature and Theatre Studies – a course that offered a superb balance of theory and practice. We were forever working in teams to make theatre, film and television and this seems to have served us all well in terms of making our way into the creative industries and cementing friendships – many of us are still close 17 years after graduation!

From YSJ I went onto study for a Masters degree in Theatre Directing at Goldsmiths College London and ran workshops at The Half Moon Young People's Theatre. My first professional post brought me back to Yorkshire, as Community Director at Interplay Theatre I worked with the Artistic Director to create multi-sensory touring productions and established a range of alternative curriculum programmes for young people excluded from mainstream education. From 2004 – 2012 I was part of the team that established and developed Creative Partnerships across the region; as Creative Programmer in Bradford and subsequently as the West Yorkshire Director. Although this experience took me away from explicit theatre work I was still able to apply all my valuable theatre learning and skills in developing induction and reflection events and supporting the creative development of others. As the Founding Director of Orangebox Young People's Centre I worked with young people and vulnerable young adults to form effective, inclusive governance and management structures. In our first two years we ran a Unitas Summer Arts College programme with Calderdale's Youth Offending Team, four theatre performances, two music festivals, two enterprise competitions, a silent rave, an open evening, a dance show in the skate park, a digital dance event involving a live-link to Paris, two club nights, a rooftop firework display, and the launch of the Piece Hall Trust.

I am a former board member and chair of the arts development committee at The West Yorkshire Playhouse (2010-2013), Chair of Chol Theatre (2008-2012), Governor at Guiseley Secondary School (2007-2011), and Trustee for the Manav Kalyan supporting a special school in Gujarat, India (2006-2012). I am currently self-employed working with a range of arts companies and undertaking a part-time professional doctorate at The University of Manchester researching applied theatre and young people's spiritual wellbeing (due to complete September 2016).

To current students I would advise: not to underestimate the level of transferable skills and creative competencies you are developing whilst studying theatre; to always remain open to learning – it doesn't stop when you graduate; think about your personal values as well as your subject area and think divergently about what sort of work might align with them.

GRADUATED 1998



Madeline Irwin photo by Chris Lord

CATHERINE GREENWOOD

What I took away from my time at York St John was a real sense of process and experimentation. We had a lot of freedom as students to make decisions and follow what was of interest to us, but in the background there was always a firm structure of support and lecturers who challenged us, opened us up to new thinking and broadened our horizons. The Chapel Studio was the centre of our world, and we felt it belonged to us, as we designed, directed, devised and performed a huge range of shows in that space.

In my third year I had a placement with Leeds TIE (Theatre in Education Company). This experience was to set me on a professional path for life; I have worked in theatre and education ever since. TIE companies were creating new work for children and young people and developing highly creative and innovative ways of interacting with the audience around a production. That this work existed was a revelation to me, and I knew this was something that I wanted to pursue; using the power and potency of theatre alongside creative pedagogy. There was very good TIE work, as well as some not very good at all; work which patronised young people, promoting a clear message, or obvious learning outcome. This would make for bad theatre and bad education. The best work however was truly inspirational, creating complex, ambiguous, poetic work which stirred the audience into exploring their thoughts and feelings about the piece and the world they were living in. These productions opened up questions for investigation, allowed for multiple readings, and gave the audience the opportunity to express their understanding using the tools of theatre and drama as the means for that expression.

I am now Learning Associate at the Unicorn Theatre in London; we create around 20 new productions for children and young people each year working with ages 0 to 18. My job is to create learning programmes which give teachers ideas for classroom work that extend and deepen the children's engagement with the theatre experience and links to their classroom objectives.

The main challenge is in negotiating the interplay between art and learning. We want to ensure that our young audiences have an experience, on their own terms, which can live on in their imaginative and emotional lives, and that teachers (who have very crowded timetables and increasing pressure for attainment) get as much value as possible from taking their pupils out of school to see something unpredictable and challenging which will engage the hearts and minds of their students.

GRADUATED 1983



Caucasian Chalk Circle at Unicorn Theatre, Kiran Sonia Sawar Photo Manuel Harlan

TORI WRANES

Dear Ripon and York St John,

I am trying to think of what led me to Ripon. And I honestly think it was the moustache of Harold Robinson. I just really liked his style and the way he talked about theatre. I first met him as a guest professor at The University of Agder, Norway, where I then studied theatre.

Not long after I arrived at the Campus in Ripon, and to my surprise the threes were filled with people in white robes doing some sort of exercise.

I was at the right place in Ripon, and today I am very grateful to this practise. In Harold Robinson's class we worked with text and more classical theatre. It was fantastic to have such a dedicated teacher. Playing Lady Chatterly (as I remember her name), I stabbed someone in the chest, so that he fell into a well and drowned. I was amused by these big emotional waves in melodrama.

I guess some of this drama also took place in the football and basketball teams for girls, where I took part. I remember there where a bit of a catfight in the team. But when I scored on a back-hand my status was readjusted. (...and my bad English more excepted).

In Simon Murray's class we experimented with a lot of different things. We made a script for a theatre piece by recording conversations in the supermarket. We also worked very much site-specific, and a lot of the things I was presented to in these classes are very relevant in my work today.

My time in Ripon was a great bark!
As you see my English has not getting any better.
But its not about right and wrongs
It is all about looking the well into its eyes!

All the best

Tori Wrånes
Artist

PS: I loved the smell of the farmers at the local store, and it's still a mystery to me how the girls survived winter wearing only skirts and high heels.



**IN MEMORIAM
HAROLD ROBINSON 1950 - 2015**



Harold Robinson, Senior Lecturer in Theatre from 1978 until 2010, died in April 2015 after suffering a stroke the previous November.

Harold was originally appointed to the Ripon Campus of the University College of Ripon and York St John and in the early 1990's established the CASMAP degree programme which later evolved into the present BA Drama & Theatre suite of degrees.

Many will remember his unique approach to the subject, especially his concise, critical analysis of performed work. He had the ability to see through the superficial and address the issues that lay at the centre of any performance — which could often be a painful experience for the recipient! For some this made him a formidable figure but his uncompromising attitude to the subject was always intended to encourage the best in his students and help them achieve their full potential.

Harold was a true English eccentric; his idiosyncratic and often humorous approach to drama and theatre (and life in general) left an indelible impression on those he met. His legacy continues to resonate within the performance department. He will be sadly missed.

John Merrylees
Head of Drama & Theatre



**Drama & Theatre
BA (Hons)**

**Drama: Education & Community
BA (Hons)**

**Drama & Dance
BA (Hons)**

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PERFORMING HOUSE 2015-16

Wed 30th Sept 2015 Theatre Company Blah Blah Blah present *Bag Story*
11am & 1pm Drama Studio 1

Wed 21st Oct 2015 La Pelle's Factory present *Clouducuckoolander*
7:30pm Drama Studio 1

Wed 28th Oct 2015 Clean Break present *Sweatbox*
Throughout the day Site Specific (sign up for time and location)

Wed 4th Nov 2015 Claire Hind & Gary Winters present *Dreamyards*
7:30pm Drama Studio 1

Wed 27th Jan 2016 Shonaleigh presents *The Diamond Girl*
7:30pm Drama Studio 1

2016 date tbc Peter McMaster presents *Wuthering Heights*
Drama Studio 1

For more information and tickets visit: www.yorks.ac.uk/artsevents