

CHAIRPERSON ANNUAL REPORT

2010 was a memorable year for BYT. BYT celebrated its 21st year and I was pleased and honoured to be Chairman during that time.

The success of BYT has always been due to the dedication and huge loyalty of all involved and it is testimony to the efforts of a host of people over the years that BYT not only exists after 21 years but that it continues to aim high. The other secret has been the ability to change and adapt. That dedication continues. Last year, at this time, we made some changes to the way BYT was managed and these have largely been successful. Trustees, including young people representatives, meet 4 times each year to discuss and determine overall policy. Organising groups meet as necessary to carry out individual tasks.

In simple terms, BYT aims

to use drama and the learning of theatre skills to promote the education, the social skills and self-confidence of youth people

to encourage and provide opportunities for young people to work together as a community and, in doing so as participants and volunteer leaders, to experience the practical workings of the theatre while respecting its skills and disciplines

to promote equal opportunities and participation in theatre among Borders young people by providing opportunities for young people who do not normally have access to drama workshops, theatre and performance

to promote and ensure services for the Arts in Scottish Borders, specifically Drama and Theatre, including the establishment of a permanent Youth Theatre in the Scottish Borders

Through 2010, we continued to have considerable success meeting these aims. In particular, we have participants from a wide variety of backgrounds and areas, including a number with specific difficulties, physical, emotional, home etc. All are able to find a place in BYT. Indeed, for many, BYT is the place they feel most comfortable. More importantly, it is unlikely that an observer, or indeed other participants, will be aware of these difficulties. BYT works hard to involve and integrate all young people but, we are a youth theatre working with young people, not a youth group or a specific ability group which happens to do theatre. This does mean we have to work hard to persuade certain funding bodies that we merit their support and this is an area we need to develop.

The past year has been another busy and successful one with the usual mix of weekly workshops and projects. The aim of workshops is to develop skills and techniques rather than develop specific performances, though each group will try to showcase some of their efforts at some stage during the year. It is important that the workshops are not a disproportionate drain on resources. It was a difficult decision to raise fees for this session though, we believe, these are still very reasonable. In addition, we have set aside a specific sum to support some participants with some or all of their fees. Workshop numbers need to average around 15 to be viable and unfortunately, due to very small numbers, we have had to suspend the Hawick groups, temporarily, we hope.

The larger, mostly holiday time projects remain a vital part of our work.

Last Easter, at Earlston Primary School, Juniors performed the Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe with Seniors assisting with production. In October, the Seniors worked in Jedburgh Town Hall on a devised piece which was lots of fun – Random Acts of the Macabre. Juniors helped devise Pieces of Chess which they performed very successfully at St Boswells. For the second year, for a variety of reasons, the numbers of juniors was disappointingly small and we are planning to change the format for this October. To celebrate our 21st year, Summer 2010 saw one of our most ambitious projects ever with an amazing and hugely

successful outdoor production of Peter Pan at Bowhill. This was an enormous undertaking and, given the unpredictability of Scotland's weather, a risky one. However, I'm sure every one of the large audiences who attended will remember the event for a long time.

As always, a mix of fees and grants funds our work. We continue to be grateful to Arts Development at SBC whose support, both through grant and in kind, is invaluable. Kirsty Taylor and Lisa Denholm deserve special mention. Of course, BYT is not alone in trying to find funding and there is increasing pressure on all funding bodies and trusts. However, despite this, we have had some success in obtaining funding from new sources. It is, however, very time consuming and often frustrating.

This, of course, means that we have been trying harder than ever to raise money through our own efforts by local fundraising. This has included a very enjoyable Burns Supper at Smailholm, a large raffle during the summer and an auction at Aikwood Tower. (We are grateful to Judy and David Steel for hosting this and our Birthday BBQ). Together with individual donations from sponsored slims and a sponsored walk and an individual appeal to parents this has certainly helped. Jennie Bisset has been the driving force behind much of this and she and her group are to be congratulated on their efforts. Local fundraising will always be limited – there is a limit to how often we can ask the same people for support so this requires some imagination. I know there are already events planned for the coming months. Another restriction is that BYT has no specific base round which to organise events. However, as shown during Peter Pan last summer, there is huge willingness among many parents to help when they have a specific task to perform. We need to develop this – it would be great to see parents organising small events connected to each workshop area – we can but hope.

Looking ahead is, at the same time, exciting and somewhat uncertain. Clearly, there will be a huge squeeze on finances with increasing costs for travel, the hiring of venues and materials etc, cuts in all areas of funding and pressures on the finances of individual participants and parents. BYT will continue to be run by volunteers but to employ talented professional practitioners. Our long-term aim remains to obtain sufficient funding to allow us to plan ahead with more certainty, perhaps with a full-time Artistic Director. Meantime, we employ a part-time administrator to cope with the considerable day to day demands. Until recently, that was Sarah Gulliver-Goodall and we are extremely grateful to her for her very supportive efforts. We are lucky to have had a relatively smooth change over to Judy Collins who has taken on the task.

The mix of workshops and projects will continue. Following a recent advertisement, we are recruiting a number of additional potential leaders and are investigating setting up new groups in Coldstream and Eyemouth as well as reviving groups in Hawick and Peebles.

Continuing our policy of trying to give opportunities across the region, our Easter project will be held in Kelso with a production of Fantastic Mr Fox. We already have a provisional booking in Melrose for an exciting project in the Summer which could be something a little different for BYT. In the past, in October, we used to develop a piece which we then toured around the Borders. We are hoping we might be able to that again this year. Obviously, all of this will depend on funding and that is the main area which will occupy our attention in the months ahead. As well as continuing the larger applications, this has to include finding ways to involve participants and parents in smaller local projects.

I began by saying that the success of BYT is based on enthusiasm and dedication and I am grateful to the other Trustees for their continuing help and support. In particular, our Treasurer, Primrose Scott, who patiently listens to my outrageous suggestions but keeps track most efficiently. Thanks are also due to all of the people who have been involved through the year, whether professional leaders, volunteers, parents or the huge numbers of fantastic young people with whom it is a privilege to be involved.

Borders Youth Theatre involved around 200 of those young people in its activities last year and has a huge impact on a great number of them. I believe there is still huge potential to do more. In the meantime, this is something of which we should all be very proud.