

The Annual Report is an opportunity to reflect on all of the work done by BYT over the past year. It is also an opportunity for the Chairperson personally to reflect.

To an outside observer, it might appear that this has been a relatively uneventful year for Borders Youth Theatre. All of the key activities have continued as usual. Weekly workshops have continued to be generally well attended though we still struggle to attract numbers at Peebles and Galashiels. Indeed, as the Showcase in February 2013 showed, the work done in workshops is hugely varied and hugely enjoyed by the participants. Over 100 parents and friends who attended were able to see this for themselves.

Each of the main school holidays saw major projects for both Juniors and Seniors. In October, A Tale of Two Shakespeares was performed by Seniors in a variety of venues across the region and received considerable acclaim while 17 Juniors created and performed at the Eastgate in Peebles. The Senior project was accompanied by a series of workshops which we were able to offer free to schools.

The Easter Junior project grew yet again with over 40 Juniors mounting a wonderful performance of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. To produce this in the short time available was a huge tribute to the efforts of the production team, particularly Jane Houston Green. Generally, at Easter, Seniors have limited time because of exams etc. However, this year they were keen to perform and created an inventive and exciting site specific piece It Doesn't Have to be Zombies.

For Summer 2013, Seniors returned to Jedburgh. John Haswell created a new version of Sweeney Todd which we rehearsed and performed at Jedburgh Town Hall. We were very fortunate to gain the services of Chris Achenbach who wrote some fantastic music and acted as Musical Director. We hope this is a partnership which can be repeated. Meantime, Juniors were offered two day workshops in 6 different venues across the region. These were largely led by ex-BYT Senior leaders.

We also had a very successful BYT @ The Wynd project - this time, Kelso Seniors performed The Heights to almost sell-out houses.

Alongside these regular activities, were one-off projects such as Scary Tours of The Haining - another site-specific piece.

So, it would appear, business very much as usual.

In fact, although work did continue much as in previous years, there were some subtle and some major changes going on.

The aim, in recent years, has been to try to make Workshops self-funding. We have not achieved this. In fact, it is clear that the present financial circumstances in which many families find themselves mean that many are having to prioritise and 'ration' their children's activities. We continue to help where we can. However, it is likely that there are many young people who do not wish to ask for help and simply do not attend. While the key priority of BYT continues to be producing high quality drama experiences, the weekly workshops are a key feature and the first opportunity for many young people. How to increase and maintain access to as many young people as possible is an area we must continue to address.

We unfortunately lost the services of one of our workshop leaders but were fortunate to welcome back a leader to take over the two groups. We enjoyed returning to the Arts Centre in Galashiels (now MacArts Centre) and hope we will be able to continue this partnership. We continue to monitor numbers, particularly at Peebles, though we will consider the workshop programme as a whole when reviewing resources. We will continue to investigate the possibility of setting up groups in other areas such as Hawick, Eyemouth etc.

It has been a feature of projects this year that we have been able to work not only with experienced 'regular' leaders but also with a number of new practitioners who have brought new skills and new ideas to BYT. This is a very positive feature which we will hope to continue.

We continue to try to take BYT activities as widely across the region as possible. Over the year, we have run workshops or performed as far afield as Peebles, Eyemouth and Selkirk and used new venues in Walkerburn, Stow and Coldingham. This is a key part of BYT's work.

The largest change over the year has been in funding and plans for organisation.

It is a continual struggle to secure sufficient funding to maintain and extend BYT activities. This year has seen a number of successful bids, including three large sums.

Creative Scotland agreed to a request for £11000 for our October Senior project, A Tale of Two Shakespeares. This allowed us to extend the touring performances and offer a dozen free workshops in primary schools.

We were invited by General Mills in Berwick to apply to their International Fund. We were successful and were awarded \$20 000 (£12 500) towards a variety of projects. (Most of these will take place in 2013/2014)

The Robertson Trust agreed to grant £6000 towards the costs of a Project Co-ordinator. (see below)

We also received smaller, but no less important, grants from Hugh Fraser Foundation, Gordon Fraser Trust and Cash4Communities. This together with our core funding from Arts Development at SBC has meant that we have been able to offer a wide variety of activities to our participants without increasing costs to them (and in some cases offering them free). It also means that there are sufficient funds for at least part of the 2013/2014 programme.

It does take considerable time and effort to pursue funding applications.

When I agreed to rejoin the BYT Board, one of my agreed aims was to secure sufficient funding to appoint a Project Co-ordinator who would take over most of the main time-consuming roles normally carried out by the Chair and also to co-ordinate specific fund-raising. I am therefore delighted that funding is in place for a part-time post for the year 2013/14, and that The Robertson Trust has agreed to consider a further application to extend the funding for a longer period. (Following an application process, we were able to appoint Michael Richardson as part-time Project Co-ordinator for the coming year.)

One of the other aims for this year was to increase the number of Trustees and we have had some success here.

We have also begun to review our current three year plan and, with the help of the Project Co-ordinator, this will be a major task for the coming year.

BYT receives feedback on its work in a variety of ways.

We collect specific oral and written feedback from participants following projects and from sample workshops. We survey audiences at performances. We receive anecdotal comments from school staff and parents. We often try to use 'neutral' evaluators to reduce possibilities of influence. We use this feedback to amend and modify what we offer to participants.

The message from all this feedback is overwhelmingly positive, whether simple enjoyment by participants and audiences, reports of improved attendance and behaviour by schools or increased confidence by parents. It is clear that the feedback we receive is often from people already positively disposed towards BYT. It will be worth investigating how we might best extend our methods of evaluation.

Whatever method of evaluation we use, we can be sure that BYT will continue to make a difference to the lives of hundreds of young people in the Borders. Whether that difference is small or life changing, I would urge everyone connected with BYT to continue to support in every way possible so that BYT can continue to do what it does so well.

Next year, 2014, sees the 25th birthday for Borders Youth Theatre. There is much to celebrate about these 25 years and much to look forward to.

As I noted above, I agreed to rejoin as a Trustee to try to secure sufficient funding to consolidate the management and organisation of BYT. Although there is still much to do, I believe a sufficient start has been made along this path. I therefore will be looking to step down as Chairperson at some stage over the next year.

I would like to thank the Trustees for their support over the past year. I give particular thanks to Primrose Scott, our Treasurer and Judy Collins, our Administrator, for all their help.

It is a pleasure to work with this amazing organisation and with the fantastic young people who bring their enthusiasm and willingness to try new things.

David J Bisset
December 2013