

## **FST Producers' Project Presentation:**

**Lesley Anne Rose : Established Producer : Aberdeen Performing Arts**

**Programme of New Work at Aberdeen Performing Arts being delivered through the Producers' Project**

### **Introduction**

Out of all of the Producers' Project Hubs the one based with APA is the most embedded in the venue in terms of the ratio of work we produce for The Lemon Tree in comparison with the companies and individuals we produce outwith APA.

The main reason is that there is not the critical mass of companies and individuals in the region that are at the stage in their careers where they need a producer. Many are just beginning to define their work. As such the companies and individuals we do produce separately are all currently based in and around the Central Belt.

Although now seven months into being in the region things are starting to shift.

### **Wider context of working in the North East**

In terms of the wider context of starting to produce theatre in Scotland's North East, little work is currently produced in the region. The reason for lack of production can be attributed to a number of factors such as minimal investment and limited infrastructure in terms of talent, crew and space. All of which make the process of starting to create work in the region challenging.

When I first started with APA, before the Emerging Producer came on board, and before doing anything, I spent a long time reading through APA's Creative Scotland Regular Funding application and five year business plan as well as talking with senior management to work out what the organization wanted from the project and their wider strategic priorities for any theatre that may be produced or developed here.

APA's business plan says:

*We are aspiring to build a new and dynamic producing and commissioning hub for theatre arts, new writing for the stage and for talent development at The Lemon Tree with the aim of creating an enduring professional infrastructure in Aberdeen and the North East for new talent – writers, directors, producers, actors, designers and stage crew - and addressing a long held ambition to see the city create, produce and originate more work in Aberdeen and the North East.*

*Going forward our aim is to create a vibrant hub to develop talent, embed and expand networks, and create innovative work at The Lemon Tree in keeping with its role as a space for adventurous programming and contemporary and original work in theatre, music and dance.*

*Our ambition in the lifetime of our business plan is to develop the potential of Aberdeen Performing Arts as a creative focal point for theatre arts in the North East, providing artists and producers with opportunities to commission, curate, produce and create seasons of work. We will offer time, space and expertise in a creative environment for ideas to be realised from rehearsed readings to full production.*

In summary, the overall aim is for The Lemon Tree to become a producing hub in the North East and assist those who want to work in theatre to stay living in the region if they want to. This ambition

can't be realised overnight and delivered solely by the Producers' Hub, but we can make a significant contribution.

In order to define this contribution in real terms I drew up a detailed and highly ambitious producing strategy, which provides a framework around which we can focus thinking, priorities and legacy as well as define our work to APA's management team.

The plan also took into account priorities such as providing career development opportunities for the North East Youth Arts Hub, Senior Youth Theatre and help APA build city and region wide partnerships and connections.

Although I refer back and reference the work the Producer's Hub is undertaking against this document all the time, there are some subtle shifts in thinking that is effecting the way we produce. Not necessarily the ambitions of what we produce, but more the overall approach.

### Artistic Vision

It felt important to define an artistic vision for this work, which is in essence a combination of seeking out stories that Scotland's North East wants to tell and finding the people and talent in the region to tell them. Alongside inviting theatre practitioners from outside the area to develop work at The Lemon Tree. In return for the space, time and support we offer, we ask these artists to give something back to the region such as a workshop with the Senior Youth Theatre or a Youth Arts Hub North East group, or assist us in building partnerships. We also ask them to present a show of work at The Lemon Tree as a conclusion of their time with us. The hope being that they will come back and make the full show with us.

In terms of wider artistic horizons we are looking to nurture international voices and connections. Now that the new work strand is starting to bed into The Lemon Tree's programme there is more time to plan around this.

And most of all we are asking the ongoing question – what is the 'northern identity' for the work produced.

All of this is on top of supporting the existing producing work APA is already undertaking –three A Play, A Pie and A Pints each year in partnership with Oran Mor and Christmas production.

### New Work Programme

#### Scratch Nights

We started off planning the new work programme by looking the work APA had undertaken so far. Mainly a six month long development programme for ten new writers based in the region. We kicked off with a Scratch Night of their work in January 2015 which went down a storm.

This has developed into regular Scratch Night events which are open to any writer in, or from, the North East to submit a ten minute script for 1 -3 performers. Each one based on a theme and aimed at testing the ground for a future production / project.

**April: Black Gold** : looked at the human stories behind the oil and gas industry and showcased the work of a Canadian playwright from Alberta who has written work based on early oil pioneers in the state.

**June: Northern Lights:** - 2015 is the International Year of Light. We have also invited Makeshift Broadcast who are developing a show called Bright Sky Park around astronomy to join us and take part.

**October: My Aberdeen:** We are inviting people to write ten minute pieces of theatre set in a place in Aberdeen that means something to them – either good or bad. And throwing open the kitchen at The Lemon Tree and inviting people to come in and cook their favourite north east dishes with us – which we will serve up along with the stories they tell us in the evening. We're working with two local women to facilitate this called the Rhynie Woman who do lots of amazing work around art, regional archaeology and foraging.

For each Scratch Night we work with three directors and place a 'shadow director' with them such as a member of APA's Senior Youth Theatre, or someone who has come through Scrapyard etc. all of whom have directing aspirations.

We are also showing the work of one very talented writer who is part of APA's Senior Youth Theatre and offered work experience to those interested in technical theatre.

### Artist Exchanges

We have developed a programme of Artist Exchanges using the seed funding attached to the Producers' Project. As detailed we ask them to give something back to region in exchange for the support we offer them and ask that they consider returning to develop the full show with us.

### Victoria Beesley

Victoria Beesley worked with us to develop a new show about the photographer Vivian Maier. She worked with designer **Lisa Sangster** who is from Aberdeen and two final year students at Gray's School of Art, who were given the brief to take pictures of Aberdeen and respond to the city and its residents the same way that Vivian Maier did of Chicago. They took some outstanding photographs and one of them has since approached us and asked for assistance is applying for artist's bursaries etc.

As part of the exchange, Vickie ran a workshop on devising theatre for the Youth Arts Hub North East.

### Andy Cannon

A couple of weeks ago storyteller and performer Andy Cannon worked with us to develop a new show around the battle of Mons Grapius called The Last People on Earth as a spin off show to Tales of a Grandson. He has been in the area researching, undertaking site visits and speaking with academics in the archaeology department at Aberdeen University.

We are now working through the ideas he has pulled together and considering how to take this further.

### Mary Jane Wells

Mary Jane Wells has spent a week at The Lemon Tree developing a new one woman show she has written called Heroine which is based on the true story of a woman who served for ten years in the US military, leading her squadron into combat in the Middle East. She is also the victim of sexual trauma.

Mary Jane worked with scenographer Paul Burgess and director Susan Worsfold. Susan works with the Nadine George Technique, which encourages actors to speak from their 'authentic voice'. This is perfect for a show which presents someone finding the courage to speak out.

Mary Jane and Susan ran a workshop for APA's Senior Youth Theatre on the Nadine George Technique.

### **Sarah Rose Graber**

Sarah Rose Graber is working with us in October to develop a piece of work on serendipity. She will be working with Mel Woods from Dundee University and founder member of Girl Geeks Scotland who researches chance in our lives.

As part of the show Sarah Rose wants to introduce chance to the audience through interaction etc. Some of her time with us will be experimenting with how to deliver this aspect of the show and as part of her research she will run workshops with APA staff. These will also serve as team building workshops for staff.

### **Scrapyard**

In April we delivered a Scrapyard North East. Scrapyard is an opportunity for anyone who works in or wants to work in or be involved in theatre to take part. Participants are split into teams and given two weeks to create short pieces of theatre which are performed live.

Participants give their time for free in return they are given a workshop on devising theatre and a Critical Response Session on their work.

As part of Scrapyard we organised an event with the Envelope Room design collective which brought a bunch of designers who can and want to work in the North East up to The Lemon Tree to show us their portfolios and undertake a Q&A with the Scrapyard participants as well as a student from Gray's School of Art who is interested in theatre design.

We also commissioned a photography student from Gray's to document Scrapyard and in doing so build up his portfolio and help us make further links with Gray's

The end result of Scrapyard was four new pieces of work developed under the theme of Northern Lights. The project also put us in touch with a number of people in the area interested in making theatre.

### **Partnerships/cross sector working**

A big focus of the producing work is also to build partnerships within the cultural sector and across sector. So far these include: Aberdeen University (various departments), Sound Festival, Look Again visual arts festival, Deveron Arts, Findhorn Bay Arts and Play Pieces.

### **Where we are now**

We have just undertaken a detailed feedback process with those who took part in Scrapyard which we are starting to look through and digest.

The messages coming through loud and clear are that people want to work in the North East, they want space, networks and support but are floundering to know where to go with their ideas and passions yet alone how to get funding, etc. As well as lots of other points which we will work through over the coming weeks and months.

The Lemon Tree is keen to develop a resident company along side simply space and support for individuals and more informal groups. We are making in roads into this and are starting to work with a couple of people who have approached us about starting their own company. Both are dedicated to living and working in the North East and professionally trained. It could be that part of the legacy of the Producers' Hub is that this company could carry on the work started once the project is concluded, alongside developing their own projects and productions.

We are also building on Scratch Nights and working out how to make bigger pieces of work through them. As well as taking further the work that is coming through the Artist Exchanges.

In terms of pursuing the Northern identity to the work produces, we are (funding dependent) planning to link with Play Pieces by offering producing support to the companies and individuals they work with. In doing so opening up links and hopefully the possibility of a wider 'north' new writing network.

We are working on a Northern Lights season in the next brochure based around astronomy. Which will link with The Lemon Tree's Christmas production, A Play, A Pie & A Pint co commission with Sound festival based on the life of Sir David Gill, Aberdeen's Royal Astronomer, with writer Rebecca Sharp and musician Pippa Murphy, as well as a rehearsed reading of Escape Seed by Lyndsey Murdock with APA's Senior Youth Theatre, a new play based on gangs and the stars, plus a related Scratch Night.

We are also building links with Aberdeen University and a number of academics there whose work focuses on performance and working with them on the wider question of performance in the North East and Imaging Northern Futures.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The challenge is to juggle all of this while also producing companies mainly based in the Central Belt.

Also because we are so embedded in the APA team, we undertake a lot of activity such as presenting at extended management team meetings and brochure briefing as well as building a producing section on the company's intranet. All of which helps us do our job more effectively with APA, but absorbs a lot time that other producing hubs can allocate instead to freelance work etc. However, it's worth all of the time and effort to do so in order to increase the impact of the work we do.

An significant opportunity will take the form of the closure of the Music Hall in spring 2016 until November 2017. This will allow APA to dedicate more time and resources to The Lemon Tree as well as develop a presence around the city for the duration of the closure.

### **Conclusion**

I hope it's clear how the combined approach of nurturing and developing local talent, providing career development opportunities for young people, gathering stories, developing new work etc is forming a foundation upon which to build a producing infrastructure and identify which I ultimately hope will be a legacy of the Producers' Project. As well as inviting national and international voices and talent to work with us and reach out across the region and beyond by nurturing producing partnerships. With the ultimate aim of producing some kick ass northern theatre.