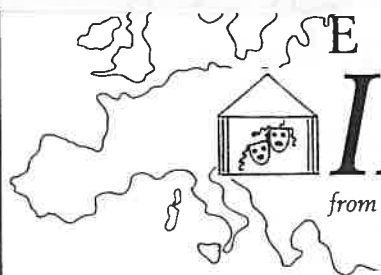


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EUROPEAN INSIGHTS

from the INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM THEATRE ALLIANCE - EUROPE

European Affiliate of the International Museum Theatre Alliance

September 2000
Volume 2, No.2



Editor's Corner

Henley in October?

The next IMTAL-Europe meeting and regional host day will be held at the River and Rowing Museum, Henley on Thames.

**The date is
Tuesday 10th October.**

IMTAL-Europe members will have the opportunity to visit the museum in the morning. A buffet lunch will then be provided, and the meeting will commence at 2 pm. Any agenda items should be sent in by October 9th.

*Please RSVP to Verity Walker on
01628 478076
or by email vjwalker@nascr.net*

Conference – Advancing by Leaps and Bounds

Planning for the 2001 conference is now gathering momentum. Members will find enclosed with this copy of the newsletter a proposal form. Each day of the conference has its own theme, and members wishing to participate should consider this closely when deciding on their proposals.

Loyd Grossman has in principle agreed to be the keynote speaker for the event, which will take place at a variety of sites in London. The Natural History Museum, Science Museum, Tower of London, and National Film Theatre/MoMI will all host sessions.

Registration forms will be sent out early in the new year, and an 'early bird' booking rate will be available until the end of March.

The conference will run from 21-24 September 2001.

In addition, any London-based members who would be willing to accommodate an overseas delegate (or even a far-flung UK one!) are asked to identify themselves to Verity Walker.

See further on page 7 – Billets and Bursaries

Good with numbers?

Professional enactors with an interest in developing maths/science characters (can be generic, i.e. card-sharps, Victorian maths masters or pawnbrokers, as well as historic figures) are invited to contact Alan Newland at Maths Year 2000 with a view to participating in MathFests countrywide during 2000/2001.

Some development funding is available as well as fees for enactments. The emphasis should be on fun, participatory activities suitable for family learning in any context: shopping centres may as easily be venues as historic houses!

Alan's contact details are:

AlanN@mathsyear2000.org
(tel: 020 7637 8800). Maths Year 2000, de Morgan House, 57-58 Russell Square, London W1B 4HP.

Note: Mailed/E-mailed contact preferred to phone if possible.

Hot News About Leverhulme Trust Bid

The evaluation project funding bid has got through the first hurdle (thanks largely to hard work by Tony Jackson at the University of Manchester). We now have to present a full proposal, so those involved are now burning the midnight oil accordingly.

At the request of the Leverhulme Trust the evaluation will now compare a museum visit with museum theatre to a museum visit without: a much more relevant comparison for IMTAL-Europe members than our earlier ideas about classroom-based learning, which would have had complicated implications for teacher cover, etc.

Initially the number of participating schools/sites for the pilot project will have to be quite limited, but once through this next stage a continuous programme of evaluation of different areas of museum theatre/live interpretation becomes a distinct possibility, with different aspects being looked at each year.

As the funding bid progresses, we bring to you an American perspective on evaluation – see Dale Jones' article on page 3 opposite.

**And for news of
our own project,
watch this space!**

Welcome new members

Institutional:

Nottingham City Museums
and Galleries
Contact: Jo Kemp, Education &
Access Manager

Deutsches Museum, Munich
Contact Davy Champion,
TheaterProject

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Current Board:

Andrew Ashmore - Company Secretary, Museum of the Moving Image

Chris Ford - Director, National Railway Museum

Christopher Laing - Director, Glastonbury Abbey

Andy Robertshaw - Director, National Army Museum

Verity Walker - Director, Interpretation

Museum Theatre and Evaluation – An Overview of What We Know

FC14476821

By Dale Jones

Advocates of museum theatre claim it is an incredibly effective interpretive vehicle for reaching audiences in an engaging, effective, and often emotional way. Sceptics are not quite so sure, and want to see some proof.

Recently I had the opportunity to gather some proof – evaluations of museum theatre presentations and programmes – when I did a presentation at the Visitor Studies Association (VSA) Conference in early August. Below is a summary of what I found about museum theatre after reviewing reports on nearly 20 museum theatre productions or programmes:

Practitioners and supporters cannot say enough good things about museum theatre;

- Visitors really do like museum theatre
- Visitors think they learn a lot from museum theatre; and
- Evaluation supports the fact that visitors do learn from museum theatre

We've got great things to say. Below are a few comments from museum directors. Read on. These are glowing endorsements:

"It does reach audiences, it does get across a message and it provides the diversity of learning experience which is ... in almost every instance a very good thing."
David Ellis, Director and President, Museum of Science, Boston¹

"(Museum theatre) is one more way of stretching our reach, of communicating with new audiences in new ways but with a consistent message."

Robert R. Archibald, President, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

"... we are totally convinced that the power of theatre as a communication medium is very, very significant..."

Ron Kazan, Director, Detroit Zoological Institute.

I could give you numerous quotes about theatre's transformational power and its many other virtues from those of us who are involved in museum theatre, but you get the point.

If there is one statement about museum theatre that seems to be universal, it is that visitors like it. In 1982, Mary Ellen Munley conducted perhaps the first evaluation of museum theatre, *Buyin' Freedom*, at the National Museum of American History. In her report², she wrote: *"The general reaction of visitors to Buyin' Freedom was universally positive. People used such words as wonderful, enjoyable, just perfect and beautifully done to express their pleasure with the program. Even the untrained observer could see things happen in the Buyin' Freedom audiences. People huddled together to be able to better see the action; distractions in other parts of the museum went unnoticed... audience members winced, laughed, sighed and sometimes even hissed."*

In a report of the exhibition of museum theatre, "Working People of Richmond" at the Valentine Museum, Karen Holt-Luetjen observed:

"Visitors were fully engaged. About 90% of the numerous visitors interviewed listed the performances as the best part of the exhibition."

In an evaluation by Diane Brandt Stillman, former Director of Education at the Walters Art Gallery, for *Of Courts and Courtship: Scenes from the Renaissance*, 95% of visitors who filled out questionnaires said they enjoyed the play greatly or a lot; 99% said they strongly agreed or agreed that they would like to see more such plays at the Walters. I think you get the idea. Nearly all visitors like museum theatre, and they say they like it a lot.

Visitors think they learn a lot from museum theatre.

In an evaluation done in 1989 of *Steps in Time* at the Baltimore City Life Museums, Dr. Michael Kiphart found that 95% of visitors thought the performance was better or superior to exhibits in imparting knowledge about 19th century Maryland history. Similar responses led Kiphart to state that while we could not confirm knowledge gain, visitors clearly thought that they had learned.

In "Ten Years of Evaluating Science Theater at the Museum of Science, Boston", a paper presented in 1999 at the VSA conference by Lynn Baum and Catherine Hughes, they note this same perception of content gain with visitors. In an evaluation of *The Masque of Leonardo*, 88% of visitors questioned felt that the play added value to the exhibition experience.

(continues on page 7)

Violet's Titanic Escape Or 'How to Act in a Museum'

HC 144 76974

By Jane
Glennie

What is an actress to do while 'resting' in Southampton's museums? Just look around and there are all those wonderful historic characters demanding to be performed. I could ignore them no longer, and embarked on a scheme to bring to life Violet Jessop, survivor of three shipping disasters including the Titanic, in Southampton's Maritime Museum.



After much consultation and support from IMTAL-Europe (including members Geoff Pye, Tim Lowe, Andrew Ashmore and Verity Walker) *Violet's Titanic Escape* began to take shape.

Violet was certainly thrown in at the end when twenty French teenagers turned up for the first performance. The prepared monologue was cast adrift as I concentrated on describing the gruesome fate of the third class emigrants on board the Titanic: "It was hard to persuade them to leave their men folk behind, few spoke English and they didn't understand what was happening."

These stories certainly held their attention, some even ventured questions and one boy picked Violet out of the photograph behind me.

So, Violet survived the Titanic, World War One, and a latter day French invasion! Her story was performed as a monologue, followed by a question and answer session every weekend during May for Museum's month.

The museum visitors listened to Violet's stories very enthusiastically and seemed to enjoy being transported back to another time. I made one American family cry (hopefully because they were moved by my acting and the material and not horrified by my Irish lilt!). Other Americans showed their appreciation by thrusting money into my hands (disappointing not to be able to accept!) and another lady came

up to me after a performance to touch my costume and said: "It is heavy, I can see why it would drag you under the water..."

Because so many crew on the Titanic lived in Southampton there are many local stories. After one show an audience member shared her mother's experience of losing her fiancé in the disaster. One gentleman thanked me for my performance, saying that his wife was illiterate and I had made the museum come to life for her.

I have now incorporated Violet into Titanic workshops for schools giving a shorter presentation, then guiding small groups of children around the exhibits. This provides a more personal response to the items on display as well as explaining what really happened and answering the common question with: "No, Violet did not know Jack or Rose!"

I am currently working with James Arnott from Beaux Stratagem and Southampton's collections department. We are developing live interpretation characters to complement a new exhibition of 18th-20th century ladies accessories in the Tudor House Museum. The exhibition opens on 16th September.

I am also co-ordinating a guided tour of God's House Tower, led by Southampton's medieval town gunner over Heritage weekend.

Violet will return on New Year's Eve and at Southampton's Titanic Conference in April.

City Culture



Violet's Titanic Escape

"there must be many nice women, mentally well-equipped and physically attractive, who had chosen the sea as a career."

Violet Jessop worked as a stewardess between 1908 - 50

Warned that such a career would damage her "spiritually and physically" Violet not only survived the amorous advances of her male superiors but also both the *Titanic* and *Britannic* disasters.

Each weekend in May, join Jane Glennie, a costumed interpreter, recreating Violet's adventurous life at sea in Southampton's Maritime Museum.

Starting 7 May every weekend at 11am and 3pm (Sundays 3pm only)
☎ 023 8022 3941



For the management perspective on this project, see over, p6.

Introducing Museum Theatre – The Management Perspective HC14477000 By Caroline Blott.

The appearance of Violet Jessop on the galleries really stemmed from Jane's being able and willing to undertake it! I had seen successful live interpretation used elsewhere and had wanted to try the approach for some time. After positive evaluation and feedback from visitors, we will definitely continue to develop museum theatre in Southampton's museums.

Even more interesting for me has been the impact of the project on staff training and development. Attendants had been asking for career development opportunities and Jane has acted as a catalyst in encouraging others in similar activities.

We have one attendant who has conducted a huge amount of research into Town Gunners, and who intends to act the town gunner of God's House Tower, our archaeological museum. Another member of staff is now interested in providing historic cookery demonstrations. These initiatives all allow individuals to pursue a specific interest and use their research to inform the characters they then develop. It's enjoyable for our staff and also leads to a better experience for our visitors.

Caroline Blott is Historic Sites Manager for Southampton's wide-ranging city museums, and is also Jane Glennie's line manager.

Billets and Bursaries!

Everyone involved in the conference is anxious to keep costs to a minimum. We're well aware of the costs of accommodation in London, and are currently preparing a list of low-cost hotel accommodation for delegates. But it's more fun (and good networking) to stay with someone in the same line!

So, if any IMTAL-Europe members who live in or near London would be interested in offering accommodation during the conference to US or further-flung UK/European delegates, please let Verity Walker know as soon as possible (01628 478076 or at vjwalker@nascr.net) stating any preferences (male/female, smoker/nonsmoker, Yankee/Confederate etc). You won't be committed to anything without the chance to speak to the delegate yourself beforehand.

We are also addressing the issue of cost for UK and European delegates by offering a discount on rates for delegates who are performing or presenting during the conference. In addition, a small number of travel bursaries will also be available. For details of how to apply, see the next newsletter.

Adverts & Information:

Information Non-members :

1/2 page ad:	£50.00
1/4 page ad:	£30.00
Full page ad:	£100.00

Members

Institutional: one free 1/4
page ad per year

Individual: all ads at 1/2
regular price

Articles/Letters/ Ads/Announcements

All contributions for the Christmas special issue
by **December 10th** please
any interesting/amusing/moving stories about interpreting Xmas?

Regional Host days – The Next 12 months

A number of regional host days are being arranged in the months leading up to the 'Expanding Horizons' conference in the autumn of 2001. These days will offer the chance for IMTAL members to visit a variety of museums in different parts of the country to sample a range of museum-theatre styles.

The full list of dates and venues will be posted to members soon. The range of dates will offer a variety of museum-theatre styles each fulfilling its role in its particular venue.

The River and Rowing Museum in Henley-on-Thames are hosting the next day, on Tuesday 10th October (see front page for details).

2001 begins with a two-day special on Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th January, at The National Railway Museum, York.

Two short plays will be performed on the galleries on those days and there will be an opportunity to chat with the company on matters ranging from the researching, writing and performing of plays in the museum; where the theatre programmes sit in the museum as a whole; and the financing and organisation of a venture that provides four performances on every weekend day throughout the year.

York is easy to get to by private or public transport. Further details of the day and how to get there will be posted with the full list of dates soon.

Meanwhile, it's not too late for your institution to be considered for a host day. If you would like to be involved, please contact Chris Ford at the National Railway Museum, Leeman Road, York YO26 4XJ. Tel: 01904 686283. Email: c.ford@nmsi.ac.uk

Museum Theatre and Evaluation (continued from page 3).

One appreciative visitor wrote an unsolicited letter to Diane Brandt Stillman, commenting on *Of Courts and Courtship: Scenes from the Renaissance*:

Countless times over the past fifty years, I have wandered through those treasures (at the Walters Art Gallery) and tried, through outside research, to become somewhat knowledgeable. But in one hour, I learned more than I did in all those hours of looking and reading.

Both the numbers and the personal anecdotes and stories from many evaluations and reports strongly support the fact that visitors feel that they learn something from museum theatre and that it is an experience that they think has value.

Evaluation Supports the fact that Visitors Learn from Museum Theatre.

There is growing evidence that visitors do, in fact, learn from their museum theatre experience. In an evaluation of *The Ballad of Chico Mendes* at the Museum of Science, Boston, authors Baum and Hughes report giving pre- and post-tests to a random sample of visitors: "Visitors were given three multiple choice questions about Chico's biography, extractive reserves and cattle ranching. Of the post-test group, 80% chose the correct answer to the question about Chico Mendes, compared to 27% of the pre-test group. For the question about extractive reserves, 98% of the post-test group defined this concept accurately, compared to 34% of the pre-test group."

In 1999 I conducted an evaluation of an exhibition and museum theatre performance at the Hershey Museum and decided to compare the visitors who had seen the performance and exhibition versus those who had seen only the exhibition. The results are startling!

When asked what they could remember about one of the three main themes of the exhibition, 94% of those who saw the performance could recall information, while only 58% of visitors who saw just the exhibition could recall some fact. In another instance only 33% of those seeing only the exhibition recalled information, while 69% of those seeing the performance could recall relevant information. While the sample size was small and the exhibition may have had some difficulties in communicating the theme, it appeared that something extraordinary was going on.

The results I have presented here are merely highlights of what is contained in the evaluations and certainly do not report on all the findings, but they do seem to represent common and important themes or threads.

One potential evaluation problem did emerge in reading these reports. Museum theatre and drama in the museum do not mean the same thing for all. For some, museum theatre is a performance created by playwrights, directors and actors. For others it is an interactive programme with actors or interpreters, who may or may not have a script, which they may or may not follow. Over the course of reading these reports I came to have a more expansive view of museum theatre, which incorporates many styles. However, I do think that it would be valuable in the future to realise these forms of museum theatre are not the same and the differences should be taken into account in evaluations.

Dale Jones is a senior associate with Institute for Learning Innovation, Annapolis, Maryland.

¹ Comments are from IMTAL-sponsored session at AAM in 1998. For the full text see: http://www.mos.org/learn_more/imtal-directors.html

² Munley, Mary Ellen, 1982. Evaluation Report of *Buyin' Freedom. Perspectives on Museum Theatre*. Washington D.C. American Association of Museums, pp 69-94.

IMTAL EUROPE

Please complete this form and return with your cheque (made payable to IMTAL-Europe) to: Andrew Ashmore, IMTAL-Europe, c/o Museum of the Moving Image, South Bank, London SE1 8XT Tel:0171 815 1336

Yes, I would like to join IMTAL-Europe

Yes, I would like to be actively involved with planning activities of IMTAL-Europe

Institutional Member - Rate £50 per year

Benefits: Free advertising in Newsletter; up to 5 additional newsletter copies; annual Membership Resource Directory; annual meeting regular seminars.

Name _____

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Institutional members can include up to 4 additional names for newsletter, depending on staff size:
1-25 1 additional copy 26 -50 2 additional copies 51 - 100 3 additional copies 100 + 4 additional copies

Individual Member - Rate £25 per year

Benefits: Quarterly newsletter; regular seminar; annual Membership Resource Directory; annual meeting.

Name _____

Institution _____

Address _____

Tel No. _____

Fax No. _____

E-mail _____

Call for Performance and Session Proposals

“Expanding Horizons”

Second biennial international IMTAL Conference
London, England. September 21-24 2001

Deadline for proposals January 20th 2001

Please use this form to submit your proposed contribution to the conference, which will attract delegates from all over the world. Please note the days of conference have the following themes.

Day 1 – A Celebration of Museum Theatre – Natural History & Science Museums

A celebration of the diversity of forms of live interpretation, with sessions aimed at both experienced museum theatre/live interpretation professionals and those who are interested in finding out more. (This will be advertised also as a one-day event for non-IMTAL members). On gallery and lecture theatre performance slots available.

Day 2 – If only these Walls Could Talk - Tower of London

The pitfalls and pleasures of interpreting the historic built environment – authenticity – reality vs replica – costumes and artefacts. Performances in lecture theatre space only.

Day 3 – Not just for kids – Natural History & Science Museums

How to use museum theatre to interpret complex/controversial issues, a look at different target markets. On gallery and lecture theatre performance slots available.

Day 4 – Evaluation and ammunition – National Film Theatre/MoMI

The power of evaluation: have you had your programme evaluated, and if so what were the findings? Will include a newly commissioned study by IMTAL-Europe. Performances in lecture theatre space only.

Over!

Your details:

Name:

Job title:

Organisation:

Mailing Address:

Phone

Fax

Email

Details of proposed contribution:

Type: Performance Workshop/lecture/seminar

Time Requested:

Workshop/lecture 90 minute session 60 minute session

Performance _____ (time required – 90, 60 or 30 minutes).

Preferred day of the conference _____

How does the proposed piece address the theme of the day?

Session abstract/performance description (50-100 words)

Details of additional panellists and performers (use separate sheet if necessary).

**Mail or fax: IMTAL-Europe, c/o Museum of the Moving Image, South Bank,
Waterloo, London SE1 8XT. Tel: 44 (0) 20 7815 1336. Fax: 44 (0) 20 7815 1403.**

Email to ashmoreacts@yahoo.co.uk

We expect to be oversubscribed, so selection will be made by the IMTAL-Europe board.