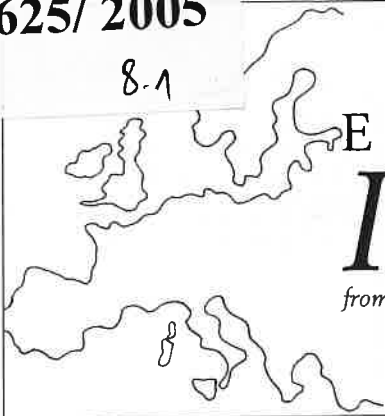


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EUROPEAN INSIGHTS

from the INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM THEATRE ALLIANCE - EUROPE

Winter 2005
Volume 8, No.1

European Affiliate of the International Museum Theatre Alliance

Editor's Corner - Robert Forshaw

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COME TO THE FOREGROUND

As you might imagine from the headline your newsletter this quarter has a very international flavour with articles from England, Ireland, Australia and America. As someone who likes to travel I love anything with an international feel to it and with this newsletter it just so happens that we have brought together opinions and developments from all over the globe. Sometimes I feel we forget that IMTAL is a truly international organisation spanning around various continents bringing together people like us who are at the forefront of the development and delivery of Museum Theatre. Since being elected my goal as a board member and Chair of IMTAL Europe is to bring the various international branches of IMTAL together so that rather than focusing on our own corner of the world we also focus on the larger global impact of the profession we all love and feel so passionately about. So what is coming up? Well firstly there is an article by my colleague John-Paul Coyle who was recently appointed

Senior Living History Interpreter for the Living History Department of Armagh City & District Council, formerly known as the Palace Stables Heritage Centre. John-Paul is replacing Ronald Kane who, in September, was appointed Culture & Heritage Officer for Belfast City Council. I am sure you will join me in extending our best wishes to Ronald in his new venture, and don't worry I will tap him up to join IMTAL in his own right a.s.a.p. John-Paul will be my number two in our programme and I hope that over the next year or so you will all get the chance to meet this splendid fellow in person whether it be at one of the various meetings in the year or in Canberra in October 2005 at the global Conference. Ah yes the conference. Well hopefully you all received an e-mail from me which called for papers for the 2005 IMTAL conference taking place in Australia, that article appears in the newsletter and should fill you in on what it is aiming to achieve. If and when further information is available I will send it on to you all. Can I

take this opportunity to encourage as many of you to scrimp and save all the pennies you need to get across to Australia? Not only will this conference be highly innovative and beneficial but it will be a damn good opportunity to get together and influence the future of IMTAL, as a whole. Less enjoyable is the news emanating from Wigan Pier. Stewart Aiken's article will bring you up to speed on the latest developments there and I hope many of you will answer his call for letters of support. Finally the incumbent President of IMTAL America, Paul Taylor, reports on their mini conference in August 2004. I am sure you will find it most informative and beneficial. So there you have it, a truly international newsletter for the end of this year. May I take this opportunity to wish you all on behalf of the board of IMTAL a peaceful and prosperous new year.



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Articles/ Letters/ Ads/ Announcements

all contributions for the next issue by February 7th

GLOBAL CONFERENCE 2005 UPDATE

We have received from our Australian colleagues the official outline of the 2005 IMTAL Global Conference. You should have received a copy of the call for papers in November via e-mail, and as you can see the deadline for this was the 10th of December, however, we have included the outline just for your information. I hope that IMTAL Europe will have a good representation at this conference, although I am very much aware of the fiscal difficulties in making the journey to Canberra. I am certainly hoping to attend and the more people from Europe we can bring along the more we can influence the development of IMTAL as a whole. My thanks to Daina Harvey of the National Museum of Australia for keeping us informed and I know that with her at the helm of the organisation committee, the conference is sure to be informative, beneficial and damn good fun to boot.

"Extending Our Reach"

The Fourth Biennial International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) Conference 2005

Hosted by the National Museum of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, Old Parliament House, Questacon: the National Science and Technology Centre, ScreenSound Australia and the National Gallery of Australia.

Canberra Australia 13 - 16 October 2005

Get ready to experience Australian hospitality at the 2005 International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) Conference, to be hosted in Canberra, Australia!

Over four exciting and engaging days, delegates from the world over

will share their knowledge and expertise in the field of museum theatre and performance. These passionate and dedicated professionals will discuss their experiences in a variety of cultural institutions and theatre companies, including zoos, art galleries, museums, historic sites and community arts groups. The conference will showcase performances, debates, presentations and workshops, inspiring delegates and generating a platform for discussion and the sharing of ideas. This is a unique opportunity to discover the latest trends and research on museum theatre and performance from the far reaches of the world.

Australia's last two national forums – Raising the Curtain and Spotlight on Performance – explored the diversity of museum theatre in Australia, as well as examining how theatre can enable museums to connect with new communities, and to give these communities a voice. The previous IMTAL conference in Virginia 2003, Roots to Branches, combined the history and development of museum theatre with contemporary practice.

In 2005, Extending Our Reach will build on these areas, exploring the following themes:

- Connecting: The use of museum theatre techniques to establish connections with new audiences and targeted communities;
- Exploring: The exploration of current research and new techniques in the field of museum theatre, both practical and academic; and
- Provoking: Methods and examples of tackling contemporary and controversial issues in public performance programs.

These themes are given as a guideline to help focus the conference – however, if you have a burning issue or amazing performance we are open to other ideas and suggestions!

Proposals are invited for

consideration by the forum working group. Presenters will have three options to consider: presentation of a paper; a performance, or a workshop.

Papers – presenters will have 30 minute time slots including questions at the end of their session.

Performances – performers may choose to present a five minute performance snapshot, at the beginning and end of each session, or as a longer piece with discussion and questions, or as entertainment for the social program and forum dinner.

Workshops – presenters may also choose to present a workshop, which are expected to be interactive and will have 2 hour time slots. Presenters must advise on the maximum number of participants. A limited number of workshops will be accepted.

Surprise us!

Any other ideas? We are open to any suggestions!

If you are interested in presenting in any format, please send a 100 word abstract to Daina Harvey at d.harvey@nma.gov.au no later than Friday 10 December 2004. In your proposal please provide the following information:

- Name
- Position
- Institution or Affiliation
- Telephone Numbers
- Postal address
- Email

Those selected will be notified in February 2005. Preference will be given to performance based presentations and papers which have not been delivered at previous conferences.

For more information, papers and images from previous Australian conferences, please see the National Museum of Australia Website at www.nma.gov.au.

Daina Harvey
Public Programs Coordinator
National Museum of Australia

IMTAL AMERICA GETS DOWN TO THE NUTS AND BOLTS

In August 2004 the incumbent President of IMTAL and Jim Murther of the New Jersey State Aquarium organised a two day mini conference for IMTAL members to come together and look at some of the day to day problems we all face in developing and running our theatre programmes. Paul Taylor has very kindly sent a report of the said mini conference which I am sure you will find interesting and helpful.

Paul: Excuse me.

Jim: Just a minute pal, I'm on the phone. Okay...right...no, the warranty does not cover poor script writing. In fact, the warranty doesn't cover anything. Why did you get it? Why are you asking me? How am I supposed to know? Oh yeah...go ahead and take you're show to a different shop...see if I care! (He hangs up.) Jerk! Can I help you?

Paul: I hope so. I am having some trouble with my program.

Jim: You're gonna have to be more specific.

Paul: Okay... it's my actors.

Jim: I've been getting a lot of complaints about that lately.

Paul: Yeah, they lack power and seem to conk out as the day goes on.

Jim: Do they make a noise?

Paul: Yeah, this prattling sound that really gets on your nerves.

Jim: Can you make the sound for me?

Paul: It kind of sounds like mutter mutter...more money...mutter...more breaks...mutter, but I'm a real actor...

Jim: Sounds bad.

Paul: And they never start when I need them to.

Jim: Wow...you may have to replace some parts.

Paul: Is that expensive?

Jim: Always...

The New Jersey State Aquarium in Camden hosted the Northeast IMTAL conference on August 14 and 15. This conference acknowledged that sometimes Museum Theater programs are put together with less than optimal parts and expected to stand the stresses of the everyday. We sometimes find that the parts we have used in the construction simply will no longer hold together. We need to make improvements and replace the most basic of parts that bear the most tension. We need to get back to the nuts and bolts. Twenty-three attendees from nine states as far away as California

and Indiana were present for the 2-day workshop. Attendees also represented a variety of institutions including zoos, aquariums, science and children's museums, academics and theater companies.

Playwright Jon Lipsky began the conference with a stirring keynote in which he encouraged us to use all the tools available to us, "So, if I have any ax to grind, it is this: that we can afford to let the passions out of the box we so often put them in. We can risk surprising our audiences who expect information but not exaltation. Let's not be afraid to scare them, turn them on, charm them, repulse them, inspire and provoke them. They can take it. In fact, they thrive on it. The more we can touch people's hearts, the more they will feel that what we are talking about matters to them."

The conference workshops kicked off with an introductory session facilitated by Paul Taylor. The Fix-it Shop was an opportunity for attendees to identify specific needs and then seek out others for solutions. Following this session was The Moving Parts: Recruiting and Retaining Actors for Museum Theatre Programs led by Jill Siegel. Jill provided some practical information on solving the unique problems faced by those who employ Museum Theater actors.

This session was followed by a series of performances over lunch by the host troupe, the Drama Gills. One show, Clouds, a five-minute movement based piece was innovative. After the trio of diverse shows, George Buss presented Recharging Your Creative Batteries. George compared our creative energy to solar power, which cannot power itself, but needs an external source to power up. George provided a number of techniques to get the creative energies flowing again. Methods included emersion in other forms of art such as music, art, and film. Unique to this session was a visit to an area of the



institution not usually thought of for waking the muse...the gift shop.

Participants were then given a top of the tank behind the scenes tour before The Playwright's Clinic workshop. In this session playwrights Jon Lipsky and L.E. McCullough led attendee's through an olfactory experience, as scenes were created and presented in different styles about the sense of smell. Of note to this writer were several monologues based on personal experience that were particularly moving.

The morning of day 2 began with IMTAL president Lynda Kennedy presenting a session on Shop Talk. This workshop dealt with using the correct educational vocabulary or edu-speak of the day. From Lynda's essay in the program book, "We need to talk like the people on whom are survival is dependent. We need to use the phrases that resonate with their world-view. If

you are under the education umbrella at your institution, then you better fire up your computers and go check out NCLB. Don't know what NCLB is? Learn it." (For those of you not in the know, NCLB refers to No Child Left Behind.)

The afternoon session of Financing the Fix was very helpful and gave advice on securing funding for your program. Led by Julie Johnson from National Science Foundation and Karen Serfass from New Jersey State Aquarium, they presented via PowerPoint presentation and handouts useful principles in understanding what a funder is looking for in a proposal.

The conference ended in a whirlwind of energy as the always-animated Jonathan Ellers presented the final session, the Theatre Eye for the Museum Guy. Jonathan had brought with him a vanload of innovative staging and prop ideas

that he shared with group. There were more secrets revealed in this session than the human brain could possibly retain. Jonathan shared his famous "Just give it eyeballs" technique as a way to animate any object. Jonathan also charged us with the slogan "Dare to Suck" and challenged us not to be afraid to try new things.

When the dust had cleared, the comments regarding the conference were very positive. One individual said, "So happy for a regional conference and the chance to really connect with individuals." And yet another said, "not too may frills, just solid content." So positive were the responses that there is already discussion of a Northeast Regional conference to take place in August of 2005. Keep checking the website at www.imtal.org for details. An on-line copy of the conference handbook is available. This program has some helpful articles and can be requested at philazoo@aol.com.

-Paul Taylor

Continued over

So Who Am I?

JOHN-PAUL COYLE,
SENIOR LIVING
HISTORY
INTERPRETER,
IN ARMAGH

Well answers on a postcard please! That's a question that I still struggle to answer! I am the new Senior Living History Interpreter for the Living History Department here in Armagh, Northern Ireland. The post has some rather large boots to fill, as I have taken on the post that has been vacated by my good friend and colleague Ronald Kane who has moved on to a new direction with his career. I am not as class, as Robert would like you all to believe he is, in achieving his degree from Cambridge (Poly!!). I gained mine from a good old "Norn Iron" university. I studied Theatre Studies at The University of Ulster, Coleraine; I graduated during the great summer of 2002! A great learning centre where playing a drunkard was a specialty!

After I graduated I was left questioning my future career path, do I go into the business side of theatre, technical or do I tread the boards, well none of these tickled my fancy. It was a lucky break that-



previous employer The National Trust, had decided that our staff Christmas party should take place at The Palace Stables, where warmed by the sweet sensation that is Mulled Wine, I saw my career, nice costumes, nice acting spaces and alcohol, I was hooked! I was kindly given a free hand by the property manager of Wellbrook to develop a living history programme where I gained my first experiences of being an interpreter. I loved every minute of it, I could be rude and charming and entertaining and get away with it!

So after scouring every newspaper and website for jobs, from art galleries to theatres I came across an advertisement for a post of Living History Interpreter at The Palace Stables, Armagh, and I was successful and gained employment! October 2002 was the month of reckoning when I first tried on my alter ego's clothing, for those out there with a non PC mind, not my wife or girlfriends clothing. As an interpreter I have had many challenges from tearful children to over excited grannies. I have inter-

preted to a wide spectrum of society in a variety of locations, in fact I could say I have interpreted for God, well to be honest it was Eamon Holmes for BBC's 'Songs of Praise'!

I am very grateful to find myself in this new position as I look forward, with a hint of fear and a large dose of excitement, to the challenges that lie ahead. I feel that one of the most exciting and challenging aspects of my new post is the promotion of IMTAL Europe. I have already been bombarding friends in the industry with my notes of high praise for this organisation and the great benefits it has to offer. What I love is the sharing of ideas and experiences and I look forward to hearing these in the future. Some of you I have already met, I was selling our programme and IMTAL at W5 during the GEM conference in Belfast and some of you had the pleasure of my company at the mini IMTAL conference in Armagh where I ferried you to and from the two Belfast airports, I hope the drive is one you shant forget!! To the many I haven't had the pleasure of meeting I look forward to meeting you all in Australia 2005 and sharing a "tinnie" or Two!

THE WIGAN PIER EXPERIENCE

Just a few weeks after the IMTAL A.G.M at Wigan Pier, the staff finally got details of the proposed development of the museums and other sites as part of the new Wigan Pier Cultural Quarter project planned for the area.

Wigan Leisure & Cultural Trust who run the site have decided to re-vamp and develop a number of its services under a programme called, "Get Wigan Active". This involves not only the redevelopment of Wigan Pier, but major changes to other sports and leisure facilities across the borough. New builds, extension to services and new programmes aimed at raising the levels of participation in sports, arts and libraries.

What this means for Wigan Pier is big change! The level of this change came as a surprise and a big blow when first announced but now the only way to look at it is to seize the opportunities presented.

At the end of Easter 2005 the Wigan Pier Experience will lose the Museum of Memories exhibition and the Trencherfield Mill building for redevelopment apart from our newly refurbished Mill steam engine and Engine House. At that point all other services will be concentrated on one side of the existing site around the Victorian theme museum *The Way We Were* and Education building. The staff will be reduced by over 50% during this transition time until sometime in 2007 when the building work has taken place.

The Theatre Company we will be reducing to two full time actors, Development Officer and myself. We will be offering a minimum of performances with the Victorian schoolroom and Engine House interpretation at the core. Performances beyond that will be developed as the impact on visitors is seen but will include solo work and developing drama workshop situations. The company has already grown it's outreach work into youth & community theatre as well as school visits and this will continue when able.

From the end of 2007 is a bit of unknown in terms of actual services to be provided in the cultural quarter. From the developers point of view there will be; a hotel, loft apartments, offices, pub and a 500-seat arts centre. The contents of other spaces are being developed through a series of consultations and feasibility studies. The main stakeholders come from arts education, voluntary & professional arts groups as well as the heritage services from Wigan Pier. The overriding theme of "create" for lifelong learning has been established and will look to link the heritage of the Mill engine to the new possibilities of the Arts Centre. There is a desire to use the collective skills in using all arts to create an experience which school groups will want to come to but will also be available to the general public to participate in.

I would hope that all the work that we have developed over the last 3 years in live heritage interpretation linking with our heritage education team along with our outreach work with the arts development team will stand us in good stead to be included in the eventual mix.

The management team at Wigan Pier is now pushing to make sure that some of the existing heritage exhibits are transferred to the new venue and that we can continue our various interpretation styles. Any letters of support to show the regard of the work of the company and how many venues are benefiting from continued development of live work.

Thank you for all your support so far and hopefully a bright new future awaits.

Stewart Aitken
Artistic Director
Wigan Pier Theatre Company

IMTAL-EUROPE

Please complete this form and return with your cheque (made payable to IMTAL-Europe) to: Chris Bailey, Treasurer/Membership Secretary, 9 Glengall Court, 58 Codrington Hill, London SE23 1NE

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