

## Careers in Theatre

*Half Moon's flagship theatre-making programme for secondary school students*

### **This programme happened thanks to funding from:**

Tower Hamlets Arts and Music Education Service  
The Coln Trust  
Lucille Graham Trust  
Noël Coward Foundation

### **Overview**

Careers in Theatre follows a 'play in a day' model and offers a multi-disciplinary introduction to theatre-making for students aged 14-18. The programme provides participants with new skills and practical knowledge of career options in the theatre industry. Through a hands-on project management style experience, participants work alongside industry professionals, learn about all the elements, artistic, technical and administrative, that go into creating a piece of professional theatre performance. They see their ideas realised on a professional stage and share the process of their making with each other across the day.



In the main, the programme works with Year 9 and Year 10 students who are just beginning their GCSE Drama course (many schools in Tower Hamlets now do three years of KS4 starting GCSE courses in Year 9) and offers a unique opportunity to bring a class together in a day of team-building, which can continue to shape their collaborative practice throughout the rest of their course. The programme offers students from different schools the opportunity to

work together and learn valuable collaboration skills. The programme also offers teachers some inspiration to bring technical aspects into their GCSE Drama lessons, in order to cater for the needs and aspirations of all their students.

Each discipline is run by a Lead Tutor with at least ten years' experience in the industry. Each group is supported by another Tutor, often an actor, with skills in facilitation with young people. Each group also has support from recent graduates and current undergraduate students from local higher education institutions (Stage Management, Lighting and Design students from Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance; Drama and Applied Theatre Education students from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama; Production Design students from the Cass School of Art, Architecture & Design). Participants therefore have three tiers of role models from whom they can learn about routes into the industry and decision-making processes, about course options and career pathways.

The script extracts used in Careers in Theatre are written by professional writers, who are in the process of developing new productions with Half Moon. Where possible, the writers attend each day to see how their pieces are interrogated and used by the participants.

## **Evaluation Summary: Phase 1, October 2019**

For Phase 1, we worked with 13 schools and 263 students from Tower Hamlets. Students ranged in age from Year 9 to Year 13.

### **Schools**

Bishop Challoner Catholic School  
Bow School  
Central Foundation Girls' School  
George Green's School  
Langdon Park School  
London Enterprise Academy  
Mulberry UTC  
New City College  
Oaklands Secondary School  
Raine's Foundation School  
Sir John Cass School  
St Paul's Way Trust School  
Swanlea School



### **Tutors working on the programme**

#### **LEAD TUTORS:**

- Participatory Artist and Creative Producer who works nationally and internationally on projects that respond to everyday needs;
- Theatre Technician and Lighting Designer who works on plays and musicals in the West End and beyond;
- Theatre Designer who works on dance, opera and outdoor productions, including work for National Theatre Wales, The Royal Court, Wildworks and Soho Theatre;
- Stage Manager who works in a variety of genres including theatre, festivals, dance and city wide events;
- Pianist, Composer and Musical Director who tours internationally and writes for theatre and dance productions.

#### **SUPPORT TUTORS:**

- Actors who are also experienced facilitators;
- Student from Central School of Speech and Drama, training in Drama and Applied Theatre Education;
- Recent graduates from Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, training in Stage Management, Acting and Scenic Art and Prop Making;
- Student from Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, training in Lighting;
- Students from the Cass School of Art, Architecture & Design, training in Production Design.

### **Monitoring**

- 263 young people took part in Phase 1
- Teachers identified ten students as having special educational needs (all of whom had cognitive disabilities or communication needs).

## Feedback from participants in Phase 1

### Lighting design:



*I learnt how to create different moods with lighting, through various colours and shapes. Now I understand the different things that lights represent.*

*I felt proud of myself when I put the lights up at the right times.*

*I enjoyed working on the lighting design and being part of the team.*

*I learnt how to use the lighting desk, inputting the different settings on the computer, matching them to be in time with the sound and acting groups.*

*We worked hard and the leaders helped us achieve what we wanted to do.*

### Stage Management:

*I learned a lot about the different roles in theatre and how important stage management is to help the whole project come together well.*

*I really enjoyed having the authority to be in charge of a situation and talking in front of everyone to get their attention.*

*I enjoyed experiencing things professionals do. It was a blast and the most fun I had all week.*

*I achieved leadership skills, as I was head of the production meeting and the tech rehearsal. This was my first time leading a large group.*



### Acting:



*It was so cool to see how lighting, sound, design and stage management contributed to acting. I really enjoyed watching it all fit together at the end.*

*I am proud that I actually performed in front of everyone, as I would not have been able to do that before. I learnt it's only embarrassing to perform if you give it 50% or 60%, but if you give it 100% and more - it makes it look incredible.*



*We made an absolutely fantastic performance that I loved entirely. It was amazing to be part of it as I learnt a lot of new skills.*

*The actors have so many more things to do than I expected and I am amazed that we achieved what it would normally take weeks to do.*

*I have realised that there are more careers in theatre than you would know.*

### Sound design:

*I learnt about different ways and ideas to make sound as well as how to adjust it to fit the scene. I now understand how to control sounds through changing pitches, pan and reverb.*

*I now know that in theatres, the sound departments run on teamwork.*

*I enjoyed it most when we went outside and made sounds out of the material we found.*



*I was surprised at how music actually makes a big impact in acting and that without sound you cannot make the perfect performance.*

### Set design:



*I really enjoyed expressing my creativity through creating props for the stage. I also learnt how many things you can make with one material.*

*I learnt that performing arts could take you somewhere.*

*As it was the first time I have worked in the theatre designing, it makes me feel proud of myself as I tried something different. I learned so many things because I hadn't experienced this ever.*

*I felt proud of speaking in front of everyone, as I communicated with people I have never spoken to before.*

*I learnt the ins and outs of a production and how it takes a big team to produce it.*

## Comments from Teachers

**Kevin Eastwood, Head of Drama, Bishop Challoner School:** *The students in the sound group were encouraged to believe there are no limits to the types of sounds or music they can create. Student x in sound worked more professionally than I have ever seen him do before. They were really focused and committed compared to their usual behaviours...The Stage Management team gave the students complete ownership over the course of the day to communicate with all groups and be responsible for the marketing of the programme...I thought the most successful element of the overall programme for my students was the hands-on approach to the different disciplines within a production. I learned as a teacher that enrichment opportunities, such as this programme, continue to develop the whole child, which is also essential in preparing them for post-16 life. It was such an enjoyable opportunity to witness.*

**Alison Ball, Drama Teacher, Central Foundation Girls' School:** *One of my students in acting told me their confidence had grown so much and was glowing! It was fantastic to see relationships forming across schools...Two of my students in lighting were a little underwhelmed at the beginning of the day, but they were totally transformed by the end! Very excited about their 'lightning bolt' gobo and keen to share with me all the things they had created...Three very vocal girls in the design group who were a little chatty first thing, but they became completely absorbed in the process – real ownership of and pride in their work. Their focus changed entirely... It was wonderful to hear how in charge of the choices the students were in the sound group. It was their work and they were immensely proud...The trust and independence placed in students was the most successful element of the overall programme and this grew as they took ownership of roles. The way each group bounced creative ideas off the other groups and negotiated as well as the pride each group took in what they had created for each discipline.*

**Oge Eke, Head of Drama, George Green's School:** *This is one exciting way to get young people into drama and theatre! An eye-opener for them who are mostly restricted to performing and acting in secondary schools... Students have been taken outside their more familiar aspect of drama; performing to the more intricate...The students in the sound group learnt the layers involved in sound design – they thought before that it's just 'play music' and that's the end of it.*

**Natasha Robinson, Head of Drama, Langdon Park School:** *There was such a lovely group dynamic between the two schools, my students in the sound group said to me "Miss, we have made new friends!"...It is always so inspiring! I learn new things about my students as 'people' and it reminds me to never underestimate them... Thank you as always for giving our students such an incredible experience.*

**Bethany D'Anna-Brown, Head of English and Drama, London Enterprise Academy:** *It was great to see the students being pushed out of their comfort zone, in showing them all other departments and working with new people...As a teacher, I learnt I need to teach more design aspects practically rather than through theory, as this was very enjoyable...One of my students was inspired in lighting, at break they said to peers "my department/lighting is sick!"...Really informative and beneficial day. Incredibly adaptable and supportive staff!*

**Sophie Hopgood, Head of Drama, Raine's Foundation School:** *Really happy with CiT – a fabulous opportunity for my students. Thank you Half Moon!...Fun, engaging, practical and brilliant revision tool for Component 3 (Edexcel).*

**Lee Diep Chu, Head of Drama, Swanlea School:** *Students said they had different perceptions of what acting involved and they had learnt different skills throughout the day...Students didn't realise that lighting created such an atmosphere.*

## Comments from Tutors

**Amari Harris, Support Design Tutor:** *The agency the students had over coming up with ideas and then actually making most of what they conceptualised was so successful. The tutors most of the time included all the ideas students thought up no matter how initially difficult it seemed... As an artist I definitely learnt about how quickly a quality show can come together with effective collaboration. To think we created five different shows from five different pieces is quite an achievement. Though you felt physically tired, I also felt creatively on fire! This project is incredible for young people to be involved with. They literally have complete control with some professional guidance and they get an instant pay off with the final show which is a reward not many artists get instantly when they start. I think it creates potential into an actual solid ambition they can grasp and will spur on more careers in theatre.*

**Johnny Tomlinson, Lead Sound Tutor:** *A student on Monday started really shy and was difficult to get motivated or to share their ideas at first. By the afternoon, they ran a recording session with the sound, lighting and stage management teams in the garden where they operated the microphones and helped coordinate instructions. They got really into the whole process and seemed to enjoy the final results! It's good that students sometimes ask for constant effects or use different terminology to describe what they mean artistically, they kept me on my toes and it was really great to approach creating from different angles.*

**Joanne Sandi, Support Lighting Tutor:** *We had one student that was definitely the shocker of the week. They were not interested in lighting at all and actually asked me if they could swap and go into the actors group. After realising they couldn't change, they decided to grin and bear our group and by the end probably came away knowing lighting better than other members of the group. They were so clued up and gave an amazing speech in their marketing interview and came away believing lighting was definitely something they would consider doing in the future... Every student had an active role in everything, even if they don't want to do anything they were still encouraged to do so and made sure everyone is included. They inspire themselves as a lot of them don't realise how capable they actually are until they put their mind to it. They walk away with knowledge they never thought they could have gained and are able to express themselves freely and watch their ideas come to light. It is a very fulfilling experience for them and I would have loved to have had the option of something like this when I was at school.*

**Chloe Osborne, Lead Acting Tutor:** *On Tuesday, there was only two pupils from one of the schools in the Acting group and, at the start both looked very hesitant at the prospect of working with the other pupils who had gathered in the corner of the theatre. Throughout the morning each of them mentioned a number of times that they were going to have to leave early; one for 'football trials' and the other because 'he wasn't feeling well and his mum had said he could leave'. In the afternoon, both of them reiterated that they were going to have to leave. I asked them to sit out of the devising session to become outside eyes and act as assistant directors. Within 10 minutes of not being part of the ensemble, as they geared up into a fast paced physical call and response scene, they had both changed their mind. One said that he thought he could 'push through' to the performance after all and the other decided that he could just not go to football that evening...It was really joyful to watch both of them,*

*who had stood so far outside of the group, feel so strongly that they wanted to be part of it. During the performance, despite some major focus challenges from their previous level of cynicism in the process, both were able to commit to the best of their ability, remembered all of their cues (including some leadership actions within the chorus) and afterwards reported being really pleased that they had stayed. One said that their mum 'was going to be really proud'.*

**Teresa Holtom, Support Stage Management Tutor:** *I learnt as a facilitator that it's important that projects like Careers in Theatre take place to allow students to have a taste of what every aspect of theatre is and not just acting. A lot of students simply don't have the equipment at their schools and their teachers don't have the knowledge to be able to teach about the technical aspects of theatre. A project like this gives the students the chance to explore and be in charge of something that they may not normally do. Also, it's important that we as facilitators are able to share our knowledge through this project and show our knowledge and that you can get paid to do a job in theatre despite what some people may think!*

### **Areas for Development**

- It worked really well having undergraduate students from each specific discipline (in the past we have worked with Stage Management students from one institution who turn their hand to the different disciplines) and we will continue this for the future. Great to have three Higher Education Institutions involved this year, but perhaps one more for the future would be good so the young people get to hear about a range of options for Further or Higher Education;
- Ensure the teachers have spoken to their students about the disciplines and what they will be doing across the day before the day – this year we had lots of new teachers who were new to the project and they had not prepared their students as well as other teachers, who had experienced the programme over several years, had done so previously;
- Stage Management worked really well this year, but we may still consider making this discipline a Producer role in order to incorporate the current ways of working in small-scale theatre;
- Half Moon to consider purchasing more LED lights, which don't get hot, so the young people can handle them. Plus, more lights which can be rigged on side bars, as the young people are not allowed to climb ladders.

### **Evaluation Summary: Phase 2, Work Experience Placements throughout the year**

Thirteen students are returning to us on a one-week work experience placement across the year. Students have the opportunity to learn office admin skills, observe Youth Theatre sessions, support Creative Learning sessions in schools and assist with Front of House duties. They see performances for a variety of age groups and write reviews of these shows. They also make notes on the impact of our Youth Theatre sessions on the younger participants, which contribute to our termly evaluation reports. Finally, each student completes a Work Experience Blog about their time at Half Moon which is published on our website.

<https://www.halfmoon.org.uk/participate/work-experience/work-experience-blogs/>