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News from the
School of Performance
and Cultural Industries



University stages double act with West Yorkshire Playhouse

A new theatre partnership between the University of Leeds and West Yorkshire Playhouse is putting learning centre stage.

The University's School of Performance and Cultural Industries (PCI) will work closely with the Playhouse on a series of joint theatre projects focused on developing new and emerging talent. One of the first initiatives sees the partners link the Playhouse's new writing schemes with the University's Masters course, Writing for Performance and Publication, aimed at encouraging new playwrights and playwriting. The University and the Playhouse have now signed a memorandum of understanding to develop further projects with regional, national and international impact over the next three years.

Dr Alice O'Grady, Head of the School of PCI, which specialises in the performing arts and cultural sector, said: "This is a significant step forward in building a more solid relationship with West Yorkshire Playhouse. The link will not only benefit current staff and students but will extend into the future as Leeds establishes itself as a city committed to the development of new writing for the theatre."

Robin Hawkes, Executive Director at West Yorkshire Playhouse, said: "The partnership between the Playhouse and the University has huge potential. We are delighted to be formalising the long-standing relationship between the School of PCI and the Playhouse's talent development work on new writing."

The new partnership was sparked by talks between James Brining, Playhouse Artistic Director and award-winning playwright and screenwriter Garry Lyons, who is programme leader for the MA Writing for Performance and Publication. Mr Lyons' adaptation of *The Secret Garden* was a box office hit at the Playhouse in 2009-10. They were keen to see the two organisations build a more solid working relationship, following numerous joint activities and projects over many years. Their dialogue was spurred on by the success earlier this year of *Boi Boi is Dead*, a play developed by Leeds playwright Zodwa Nyoni while she was a postgraduate student on the MA Writing for Performance and Publication course, which went on to receive its premiere at the Playhouse to great acclaim. The play was shortlisted for the prestigious Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the foremost international award for female dramatists. The talks were also encouraged by the development of the University's forthcoming cultural institute, which from next year will provide the point of contact for arts and culture collaborations between academics and the cultural sector.

Professor Frank Finlay, Culture theme leader at the University, is heading up plans for its cultural institute. He said: "This formal partnership with the West Yorkshire Playhouse will build on what is already a strong relationship and complements the University's existing collaborations with a wide range of organisations – from Opera North and The Hepworth Wakefield to Marks & Spencer, Procter & Gamble and the Met Office."



Left to right: Dr Alice O'Grady, Robin Hawkes, Sir Alan Langlands, Vice Chancellor at the University of Leeds, James Brining, Garry Lyons.



From Leeds to Taipei

by Steve Ansell, Artistic Director, stage@leeds

On Monday 12 October at stage@leeds, Dr Adam Strickson and I participated in the launch of *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming Under the Southern Bough*, an international collaborative student project in conjunction UIBE in Beijing. The project will commemorate the legacy of William Shakespeare and Chinese Playwright Tang Xianzu on the 400th Anniversary of their deaths in 2016. The project, which is being organised by the University's Staging China Network is part of an on-going mission to promote, research and illuminate the vast history of East Asian performance. On Wednesday 14 October, less than 48hrs after the launch, Dr Strickson and I boarded a plane bound for Taiwan and the 2015 conference 'Sinophone Onstage: New Voices & Discourses in Chinese Theater and Performance Studies.'

This was the fourth in a series of events based around the theme of 'staging China'. It took place at the Taipei National Central Library and was organised by Professor Katherine Hui-ling Chou from the National Central University. On arriving in Taipei, after a day and a half of travelling (our flight to Taiwan was via Dubai, which is like travelling from Leeds to London via Birmingham...), I was struck by a number of things. Firstly it became apparent that Dr Strickson and I were the only non-Mandarin speaking delegates (so a huge thanks must go to the two young translators tasked with getting us through the conference), secondly Taipei in October is significantly warmer than Yorkshire and thirdly, and most critically, I realised that I really didn't know what 'Sinophone' actually meant. A quick look at the internet revealed that it meant 'Chinese-speaking' but I still didn't think this really explained it.

After three days of participating in some of the most challenging, genuinely inspiring and illuminating discussions, round tables, play readings and performances I have ever experienced, I now have a very clear view of what the Sinophone voice is and what its myriad of colours represents to me. The Sinophone voice is about 'Chinese-speaking' but it's much richer and more complicated than that. At the conference we experienced the Sinophone voice as expressed in mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore and even America. This is a living as well as an historic voice and it comes in many varieties. The conference and Taiwan itself has taught me many things, most of them revolving around how little I actually know and how much I still have to learn. I met some amazing people and stayed in a very beautiful city. Taiwan and Taipei have a feel and a culture all of their own and everything I experienced has either challenged or inspired me.

On the way back to the airport at the end of our trip, I found myself alone in the taxi (obviously there was a driver) feeling reflective. As I looked out at a horizon dominated by the 101 'Bamboo' Tower (the second tallest building in the world), I started to consider what I would take home with me from this experience other than some novelty snacks and a set of rather fetching Chiang Kai-shek shot glasses? Firstly, I now have a renewed respect for the power of the spoken and written word and its ability to both isolate and illuminate. Secondly I am now more committed than ever to promoting, through research and performance, the Sinophone voice in its widest sense to as many people as possible and opening up the fantastic treasures in the Sinophone canon. Finally and perhaps most profoundly, it turns out that you actually cannot have too many pork dumplings.

Steve Ansell is Artistic Director, Theatre and Production Manager at stage@leeds and one of the founding members of the Staging China Network.



Steve Ansell (left) and Adam Strickson (right)

Sinophone Onstage: New Voices & Discourses in Chinese Theater & Performance Studies and the World Sinophone Drama Competition for Young Playwrights took place between Oct 16-18th at The Taipei National Library and the Shonhang Creative Park
<http://www.songshanculturalpark.org/en/>

Studying at Leeds

MA student, Emily Bishop, talks about her first few months as a student in PCI;

"From the trips to Old Bar between classes, to the Friday trips to Ilkley, my first few months in Leeds have been nothing short of amazing. As a student on the MA Culture, Creativity and Entrepreneurship I have been given the opportunity to learn from people who are experts in their fields, who I also strongly respect and have provided me with new perspectives on a field that I love. I have met great friends who are all culturally and socially diverse and have shown me different ways of thinking about the world during our many lunch talks after our Monday morning classes, or while sitting in stage@leeds.

Leeds as a city is an amazing place for me. It is much like my home of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the feeling it radiates. It has the appeal of a big city but still has a community feel as you get away from city centre, especially on the campus. It is great that the campus is

such a close walk to city centre and everything I could possibly need is at my disposal, from Trinity shopping centre, to Opera North and other arts organisations, to the train station. One of my favourite places in Leeds is the train station – it has the ability to take me to see a new place every weekend and is always busy with city life. In my first few months here I have been fortunate enough to visit a few places that are close by via train, but my favourite thus far was Ilkley. It was amazing to see that just a 40 minute train ride outside of Leeds you could find all this natural beauty and the day there comprised of a lot of fun hiking adventures. Leeds is an amazing city to live in and an even more amazing one to study in. I am eternally happy that I chose to study here and have begun my journey in the UK at Leeds.



Staging China Network

On Tuesday 10 November stage@leeds touring and the Staging China Network hosted a very special performance by the Shanghai Theatre Academy in the University's Great Hall, commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare and Chinese writer Tang Xianzu. The performance, by students studying traditional Chinese Theatrical styles, presented four excerpts of Shakespeare in four different traditional theatrical styles including puppetry, dance, singing and martial arts. stage@leeds company members, who are currently working on a new adaptation of Tang Xianzu's *A Dream Under The Southern Bough*, which will tour in the UK and China in 2016, had the opportunity to work with the Shanghai Theatre Academy staff and students and experience first hand the skills, control and dedication needed to perform traditional Chinese Theatre.



Photography by Malcolm Johnson



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www.leeds.ac.uk/pci/events/

Graduate stars in *As You like It* at the National Theatre

BA Theatre and Performance graduate Ekow Quartey is set to star as William in the cast of William Shakespeare's *As You like It*.

Ekow graduated from the School of Performance Industries in 2011. Theatre credits since his graduation include *Spring Awakening* (Headlong/West Yorkshire Playhouse/UK Tour), *Long Story Short* (Pleasance Theatre), *Eye of a Needle* (Southwark Playhouse) and most recently completed the UK Tour of David Hare's, *The Absence of War* (Headlong).

Ekow has also been nominated for the 2015 Ian Charleston Award, a theatrical award that rewards the best classical stage performances in Britain by actors under age 30.

60 seconds with Ekow.....



What are your fondest memories of your time at Leeds?

I have a few, a lot involving the friends I made whilst at Leeds but my fondest was hearing my name called out at the Carnegie stadium during my 1st year varsity 1st XV rugby match.

Can you tell us about your current projects?

I recently worked on *Richard II* at the Globe, directed by Simon Godwin. It was such a pleasure being part of an extremely talented, confident and playful cast.

What is your biggest achievement in your career so far?

I was extremely lucky to be nominated for an Ian Charleson for my portrayal of Hans in Anya Reiss' adapted *Spring Awakening*. The Ian Charleson Awards are theatrical awards that reward the best classical stage performances in Britain by actors under age 30. The awards are named in memory of the renowned British actor Ian Charleson, and are run by the Sunday Times newspaper and the National Theatre.

How do you think your degree has helped you in your career? In particular, what skills did you learn and how do you use these in your job?

The degree like any other degree has modules you really buy into and fall for and for me that was physical theatre. It's a degree that gives you an insight into as many aspects of the theatre industry, be it practitioners, history or business. Furthermore what the degree

does focus on nearly across the whole board is an idea of group and collective, in many modules getting group marks, and in this day an age were more people are creating their own theatre companies straight out of university it's a lesson you could pay attention to.

What one piece of advice would you give to students studying on the BA Theatre and Performance degree programme?

Test yourself, pick the electives and modules you want to do, be part of as many societies and sports as possible and mostly do everything you can to enjoy your time there.

Matthew Dunster appointed associate director of Shakespeare's Globe



Matthew Dunster. Photo: Mark Douet

On 2nd November 2015, alumnus Matthew Dunster was appointed as Associate Director at the Globe Theatre. Matthew is an Olivier-nominated director, playwright and actor and has been Associate Artist at the Young Vic Theatre. In 2015, Matthew has directed *Love's Sacrifice* for the RSC and *The Seagull* for Regent's Park Open

Air Theatre over the Spring and Summer of 2015. *Love's Sacrifice* at the RSC's Swan Theatre opened to some great reviews, "proves eminently stageable and gets a first-rate production from RSC debutant Matthew Dunster that challenges the prevailing Swan aesthetic." (The Guardian). His recent production of Martin McDonagh's new play *Hangmen* at the Royal Court has just announced a West Transfer at the Wyndham's Theatre.

In an interview for FOCUS, the director expressed his excitement; "Emma Rice's slipstream. I am looking forward to seeing all the energy and innovation she brought to Kneehigh applied to the Globe and its repertoire. The plans involve extending the repertoire and using

the Globe spaces (including the new candlelit indoor theatre Sam Wanamaker Playhouse) to look at plays beyond that period." Dunster commented on his education and the collaborative skills it offered, because it celebrated "the principle of how you make work as a group of people: this involved acting, writing, directing. And also teaching. My education got me very prepared for this. We were taught voice and movement at the same time - that is very useful, because you never use those in isolation. The level of engagement on the course was very advanced: it gave me a full grounding."

We asked him to share some of his directorial approaches and he suggested that "the best way to make work is to set the company challenging tasks: for example, at the beginning of the process, I would ask a company of actors to prepare (in an hour) a short piece, in whatever vocabulary they choose, to portray the 24 hours before the play actually starts. To find the story and the backstory of the play. And this influences the vocabulary which will be used in the actual performance."

Dunster will be visiting the School of Performance and Cultural Industries in February 2016, in an 'In Conversation' session with Dr George Rodosthenous and to give a workshop for students.