Belgrade Community & Education Company

Belgrade Theatre Coventry

Stages through the Ages
A history of performance in Coventry

Familiar Faces

Early Belgrade

Medieval Mysteries

Belgrade Today

Education Pack
To support the exhibition at the Belgrade Theatre for use with young people aged 11+

LOTTERY FUNDED
Introduction and Overview

In 2007 the Belgrade Theatre re-opened after a £40 million capital development project. As part of this redevelopment the Belgrade created an exhibition space that documents Coventry’s performance history.

This education pack is designed to accompany trips to the Belgrade, and specifically to the exhibition space. It may also be used independently as a classroom resource.

Curriculum Links

History
Understanding the diverse experiences and ideas, beliefs and attitudes of men, women and children in past societies and how these have shaped the world.

Section 1 - The Mystery Plays

Exercise 1 - Modernising a text.

Know what the term ‘evolve’ means.
Understand that older texts can be accessible to a modern audience.
Learn how to modernise a text but keep the same intention behind the writing.

Exercise 2 - The Medieval Mystery Plays and identifying ‘themes’.

Know what the term ‘theme’ means in specific reference to theatre.
Understand that the Medieval Mystery Plays were created not just to entertain but also to teach.
Learn how to use drama and storytelling as a tool to inform.

Section 2 – Carnivals and Processions, and the story of Lady Godiva

Exercise 3 - The importance of the Lady Godiva story in Coventry.

Know who Lady Godiva was and why she is still a respected character in Coventry history.
Understand that sometimes less influential people need representing.
Learn how to use ‘hot-seating’ to further our knowledge of a character.

STAGES THROUGH THE AGES.
A HISTORY OF PERFORMANCE IN COVENTRY.

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Exercise 4 – Interpreting the different perceptions of Lady Godiva.

- **Know** that different versions of the Lady Godiva story have been told throughout time.
- **Understand** that people have varying opinions about how Lady Godiva felt as she rode through the streets of Coventry.
- **Learn** how to decipher a painting and create a character from a piece of art.

Exercise 5 - The Tale of Peeping Tom.

- **Know** what the term 'temptation' means.
- **Understand** that temptation can be resisted. Identify how to do this through drama.
- **Learn** how to resist temptation by discovering successful strategies through drama.

Exercise 6 - Exploring Carnivals and Processions

- **Know** what a carnival/procession is.
- **Understand** why Lady Godiva may be worthy of having a Carnival / Procession named in her honour.
- **Learn** how to create a movement piece that can travel using Lady Godiva as a stimulus.

Section 3 – Coventry’s Theatres

Exercise 7 - Performance history in Coventry.

- **Know** a brief history of the theatre in Coventry.
- **Understand** how theatre has evolved in Coventry, telling the story through presentation skills.
- **Learn** how to use presentation skills to inform and entertain.

Exercise 8 - Theatre as a development tool.

- **Know** that Theatre in Education (TiE) was pioneered at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry.
- **Understand** that drama has the ability to change people’s opinions and can play a vital role within schools.
- **Learn** how to make a piece of text into something that is accessible for your fellow students, and also has the underlying objective of exploring a relevant theme.

Exercise 9 - The staff of a modern theatre.

- **Know** that a modern theatre has more careers than simply acting and directing.
- **Understand** the make up of a modern theatre by looking at some of the professions that exist within the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry.
- **Learn** how to find a way into the arts and understand a position that may suit you with in the arts.

Section 1 - The Mystery Plays

Exercise 1 - Modernising a text.

- **Know** what the term 'evolve' means.
- **Understand** that older texts can be accessible to a modern audience.
- **Learn** how to modernise a text but keep the same intention behind the writing.

**Explain to the class what The Mystery Plays were and why they existed.**

The Mystery Plays

In the 13th-14th centuries, church services were in Latin and the words used were not understood by the vast majority of the congregation. In order to engage their congregations, further churches began acting out their messages, making them far more accessible.

The Mysteries and Coventry

As The Mysteries evolved, the Guilds (The Unions of Medieval times) took it upon themselves to fund the plays. They would take on plays that were appropriate for their particular Guild, the carpenters performing the Crucifixion, the bakers performing the Last Supper. The Guilds would use this as an opportunity to show off their individual skills.

Coventry is one of the few cities in the country to still have some of the original scripts in existence.

The Mysteries have been revived in recent years, and are often performed in Coventry. The Belgrade Theatre have produced an education pack that considers the Mysteries through time and the present day revivals. Please go to www.belgrade.co.uk to access this educational resource. ([The Mysteries - In Our Own Words](#)).

**Starter**

Ask the group to consider this extract of text taken from The Mystery Plays. The extract is taken from where God tells Adam and Eve to leave the Garden of Eden:

**GOD:**
Get out, get out you wretched pair
What did I say? You shall not dare
Eat the fruit of that apple tree
And if you did, you’d challenge me!
And now you’ve dared to disobey
You shall leave this garden - yes, today!

Ask the group to read the text and think about how they might contemporise it. They may take it out of verse and attempt to make the text sound naturalistic.

**Naturalistic**
Naturalistic text is text that sounds like everyday speech. People often to refer to the scripts in soap operas, such as 'Coronation Street' and 'Eastenders' as 'naturalistic'.

**GOD:**
Get out, get out you wretched pair
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And now you’ve dared to disobey
You shall leave this garden - yes, today!
Main

Ask the class to consider, the first half of the Cain and Abel story from The Bible (see below). Ask the pupils if they understand it and if they are engaged in the story.

Cain and Abel - Bible Story

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door, and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother and it came to pass,—when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

Ask the group to tell the story back in their own words. Then ask the group to think about how they might make this text more accessible to a modern audience. Ask them to keep the same story and themes but put it into a modern context. Ask them to consider:

- Where is the story set?
- If a modern audience were to watch a version of the story, which part of the story do you think they might focus on?
- What are you attempting to teach through your piece of theatre?
- What will the eventual lesson of your piece of theatre be? What will the audience leave with?
- What are you going to change about the language to make it more accessible to a modern audience?
- If a modern audience were to watch a version of the story, which part of the story do you think they might focus on?
- Why do you want the audience to learn from this specific lesson?

Target

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercise 2 - The Medieval Mystery Plays and identifying ‘themes’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Starter</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Main</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Split the class into smaller groups and ask them to create a piece of theatre that entertains, but also leaves the audience knowing something new. Ask them to consider the stories they used in the starter exercise as a guide to teaching through drama. Ask the groups to consider these points:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- What are you attempting to teach through your piece of theatre?</td>
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<td>- What will the eventual lesson of your piece of theatre be? What will the audience leave thinking about?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Why do you want the audience to learn from this specific lesson?</td>
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<td><strong>Ask the class to also consider structure for their pieces. Possibly use this structure to guide them in the creation of their drama.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Story Structure Point</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Notes on that part of the story</strong></td>
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<td><strong>After the students have created their modern Mystery Play, ask the groups to share their pieces with the rest of the class. The students watching the sharing can identify the lesson behind each piece of theatre.</strong></td>
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</table>
Starter

Ask the students to consider celebrities with big personalities. Ask them to think about what makes them so memorable. Ask them to consider how they walk, talk and react to situations. Ask them each to choose a particular celebrity.

Ask for one volunteer. Ask this volunteer to walk across the space as they might walk down the street. Ask them to then think about how a different person might walk (a toddler, an old age pensioner etc.). As the volunteer is crossing the space in the style of this new character, ask the rest of the class to consider what the volunteer has changed about their walk and mannerisms that has transformed them into this new character. Ask the group to suggest any advice that might make the volunteer commit to the character further, or make the character more believable.

After the students have dissected the volunteer’s walk, ask the whole class to move around the space as if they were walking down the street. Ask the students to consider how they walk (how fast or slow they move, how big their steps are, if they walk tall or walk small). After the students have considered their own walk suggest another character they might play. Ask them to change their walk accordingly, altering their speed, posture, size of step etc. to transform themselves into this new character.

Bring the exercise to a close and ask the group to consider what we have to change about ourselves in order to create a character.

Main

Split the class into three and give each of the groups one of the character descriptions below. In their groups they should discuss what they might change about themselves in order to create the below characters.

Lady Godiva
1. You lived in Coventry.
2. You lived between 1040AD – 1080AD.
3. You are married to Leofric, Earl of Mercia.
4. You donated a huge amount to the church.
5. You were very beautiful.
6. Your husband created an oppressive tax for the people of Coventry.
7. You asked him to drop the tax if you rode naked through Coventry City.
8. You asked for no one to look at you riding through the city.
9. You rode through the city with two Knights at your side.
10. You completed the task and your husband dropped the tax.
11. You went on to give away lots of your wealth to worthy causes.

Leofric, Earl of Mercia
1. You were one of the most powerful land owners who lived in Britain, second only to the Earl of Godwin.
2. You worked directly for the king.
3. You were married to Lady Godiva.
4. You and your wife, Lady Godiva, donated a huge amount to the church.
5. You introduced a massively unfair tax on the people on Coventry.
6. Your wife, Lady Godiva, bet you that if she rode through Coventry naked on horseback you would have to drop the unfair tax.
7. You lost the bet and were forced to drop the tax.
8. You died 1057 AD.

**Peeping Tom**
1. You lived between the years 1040-1080 AD.
2. You were a Tailor.
3. You were asked not to watch Lady Godiva ride through Coventry naked.
4. You disobeyed the order not to look and peeked at the beautiful Lady Godiva through the slats in your window.
5. You went mysteriously blind after you looked at the naked Godiva.

The three groups should discuss what they feel the characters in the descriptions may have been like. They should consider the way the character walks, talks, sits down, the language they might use etc.

Ask the students to think about what they might want to ask other characters from the same story. Ask each member of the class to write down three questions they would like to ask another character.

From the three groups that exist, ask one member from each to join two other students from the other two groups; this will make a group of three differing characters.

**Hot-Seating**
To ‘hot seat’ a character is to ask a character questions. A performer takes on the role of a specific character and answers questions unrehearsed. All the questions should be answered as that character and in the first person.

Each group then ‘hot seats’ each character. Ask the class to take notes, and have by the end of the exercise, a clear idea of what happened in the eleventh century to Lady Godiva.

**Exercise 4 – Interpreting the different perceptions of Lady Godiva**

- **Know** that different versions of the Lady Godiva story have been told throughout time.
- **Understand** that people have varying opinions about how Lady Godiva felt as she rode through the streets of Coventry.
- **Learn** how to decipher a painting and create a character from a piece of art.

**Starter**
Ask the group to split into pairs. In these pairs, ask the students to consider the feelings Lady Godiva may have felt as she rode naked through the streets of Coventry. Was she proud? Was she embarrassed? Was she shy?

Ask them to consider what the legend meant by ‘naked’. Some theories are:
- She had no jewellery on, which in the time of Lady Godiva would have been considered ‘naked’.
- She had to ride through the streets naked of impure thoughts, and thinking about nothing that would be considered amoral.

After the partners have had time to discuss their theories, bring the group back together to debate the issue and attempt to come to some kind of consensus on the story behind Lady Godiva.

**Main**
Ask the groups to consider feelings that Lady Godiva may have had as she set out on her ride through the city.

Split the class into five groups and give each group a different print of the paintings below (please note, larger copies of these paintings are on pages 24-26).

Each painting tells a different story of Lady Godiva and the feelings she may have felt as she rode through the City of Coventry ‘naked’.

Ask the groups to think about what Lady Godiva is thinking and feeling in their painting.

Ask each student, to create a monologue that is representative of the Lady Godiva in their painting.

**Monologue**
A speech made by one actor on the stage.

Ask the students to consider:
- Does Lady Godiva look happy?
- Does she look like she has been forced to undertake the challenge?
- Does she seem ashamed of riding through the streets?
- Does she appear confident and proud of the task she has undertaken?
- Does she look self conscious and ill at ease riding through the city?
- Does Leofric appear to have pressurised her into riding through the city?
- Do you think the people of Coventry respect her?

After the students have created their monologues, ask the students to share them with the rest of the class. After sharing their monologues, ask the students to discuss the different interpretations of the Lady Godiva story.
Exercise 6 - Exploring Carnivals and Processions

- Know what a carnival or procession is.
- Understand why Lady Godiva is worthy of having a Carnival / Procession named in her honour.
- Learn how to create a movement piece, that can travel, using Lady Godiva as a stimulus.

Starter

Please refer to the introduction to Section 2 and to Exercise 3 for background on the Lady Godiva story.

Ask the class to consider the story of Lady Godiva and what about it they feel would be worth celebrating. Ask the class to break into smaller groups and think of what theme a carnival/procession may have if Lady Godiva was at the centre of the celebration.

Ask the groups to write on a piece of paper the reasons behind Lady Godiva's 'naked' ride through the streets of Coventry. Why would people want to celebrate this act?

Main

In the same groups as for the Starter Exercise, ask the students to create five movements that they feel represent Lady Godiva's story. These five movements should encompass why Lady Godiva wanted to put herself in this position for the people of Coventry. The movements should also be put into a sequence that could be repeated whilst moving.

Ask the groups to rehearse these movements and create a travelling dance from them, forming the foundations of a mini procession. Add some music to the rehearsal time to give the students something to create their sequence to.

Ask the students to use these Success Criteria to aid them in the creation of their movement pieces.

Target     Always  Usually  Sometimes          rarely
We have created five movements that can be repeated.
We have created five movements that are clearly representative of the Lady Godiva story.
We have created a movement piece that is energetic and would be appropriate in a carnival / procession context.
We have devised a piece that has the capability of travelling.
We have ensured that all members of the group know the order of the moves, and are able to perform them for the rest of the class.

Ask the students to find a partner and discuss their Self Assessments, giving examples of how they achieved each Target.
In the 18th Century, Professional Travelling companies came to Coventry during the December to May season. With no purpose built theatres available, they performed in barns, inns and at the St Mary’s Guildhall. They attracted all social classes to the performances.

The Belgrade Theatre

The Belgrade Theatre was the first Civic theatre to be built in Britain after the Second World War and opened to the public in March 1958. It was part of the large scale re-development of the city following the devastating effects of the bombing in 1940.

Writing in The Observer, theatre critic Kenneth Tynan commented that:

"Enter most theatres and you enter the gilded, cupidious past. Enter this one and you are surrounded by the future",

The Belgrade was instrumental in pioneering the idea of the theatre building as an all day social space; in this and other respects it informed the design of many subsequent theatres.

Why the 'Belgrade'?

The name reflected the City Council’s global outlook in the 1950s. The city was brought to international prominence following its bombing in 1940, and attracted much support. Many in Europe saw the reconstruction of the city and its modern architecture as symbolic of rebirth.

Links were made with various European cities and following a visit to Coventry by the Yugoslavian ambassador, it was suggested that the theatre was named after the capital city of Belgrade to commemorate the common struggle by the people of Coventry and Belgrade for ‘freedom and peace’.

A gift of Serbian timber was made to help in the construction of the theatre. Much of this proved to be unsuitable for use in the building, being too short in length. Nonetheless, some was used in the auditorium ceiling and in the first floor restaurant and can still be seen today.

The new building

The Belgrade underwent a major transformation between 2003 and 2007 when a seven storey extension with a new auditorium, B2, was built.

Famous people who have worked at the Belgrade

Sir Trevor Nunn (Director)
Leonard Rossiter (Actor)
Dame Joan Plowright (Actress)
Clive Owen (Actor)
Sir Ian McKellen (Actor)
Michael Crawford (Actor)
After the groups have completed their presentations ask them to consider this Self Assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak clearly and clearly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am able to act at my audience and involve them in the presentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I present information that is informative and makes sense.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I make eye contact with the audience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am informative in an entertaining way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I ensure that everyone in my group takes some part in the presentation.</td>
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Discuss the Self Assessment and ask the group to give feedback on both highlights and areas for improvement for each presentation.

**Exercise 8 – Theatre as a development tool**

- **Know** that Theatre in Education (TiE) was pioneered at the Belgrade- Theatre in Coventry.
- **Understand** that drama has the ability to change people’s opinions and can play a vital role within schools.
- **Learn** how to make a piece of text into something that is accessible for your fellow students and also has the objective of exploring a relevant theme.

**Starter**

The Belgrade pioneered the Theatre in Education (TiE) movement, which used drama as a means to support education in schools. Its success spread across the UK and the world. TiE is a means to make young, and older, people learn and explore ideas in a creative way.

Ask the class if they know anything about TiE or if they have ever witnessed Theatre in Education. Ask them what they think TiE is and what objective it has within our society.

For more information on the history of TiE at the Belgrade, see ‘Theatre in Education at the Belgrade – Building on our Heritage’ (online and printed publication).

Ask the class to find partners (preferably male - female) and read the below section of script from the Belgrade’s Community & Education production of Promise.

**Characters**

**Dad** – A single father bringing up his daughter Grace, who has just left primary school. Grace is 11 years old and is about to make the transition to secondary school.

Dad has just finished a conversation with Grace’s mother on the phone. Grace’s mother, Dad’s ex-wife, has left the family home, leaving Dad to look after Grace.

**DAD:** That was your mum.

**GRACE:** Oh.

**DAD:** Yes. Don’t you want to know?
Exercise 9 - The staff of a modern theatre

Know

- A modern theatre has a range of career opportunities on offer aside from the commonly known acting and directing.

Understand

- Understand the make up of a modern theatre by looking at some of the professions that exist within the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry.

Learn

- Learn how to find a way into the arts, and discover a career that may suit you within the arts.

Starter

Split the class into pairs. In these pairs ask them to discuss the routes that people take to get into the arts as a profession, or into other careers.

Bring the class back to share their ideas. Ask them to think of a career, or dream, they wish to pursue and how they think they are going to achieve that goal. Ask the class if anyone has a clear plan of how they wish to achieve their goals. If so, ask them to present their plan.

Share your career path with the students.

Main

Present the students with this selection of interviews. The interviews are with people that work at the Belgrade Theatre in the present day.

Justine Themen, Associate Director (Community & Education)

How did you become involved in Community Arts?

I was interested in theatre making a difference. I got very excited by the growth I could see in people when they were given the opportunity to be involved in rehearsals and performing in a play. My first job was as a volunteer with a community arts outfit in Bristol, which is where I was at university. The person who was the paid support left and I moved into her role. Then the person who was directing it moved on, so I was given the opportunity to direct my first very grassroots youth theatre piece called ‘Don’t Do That’. It was about kids being told not to do things and, as we have learnt, that’s not always the best way to encourage young people not to do things.

From there I applied to be a drama worker at Dundee Rep Theatre, which has a very good history of community activity. I worked there for four years - it’s what I call my apprenticeship. I had the opportunity to work on such a wide range of projects using drama as a tool to develop personal and social skills. I worked on varying size projects, all the way up to main stage large scale community shows. From Dundee I decided to work abroad. I went back to my family roots in Suriname, South America. While I was there discovering my family, I also managed to get a job with the Ministry of Education with the Directorate of Culture. I delivered a lot of arts activities using the arts as a development tool. I was involved in theatre in development, visual arts as I was based at a visual arts organisation, in policy and strategy development. I also had the opportunity to undertake a project in Senegal. I explored the links between Senegal and its former coloniser France. It was interesting to build an understanding between the West and the countries it used to control. My main interest is working with black and minority ethnic communities, so working out in those countries really helped when returning to the UK. I stayed in Suriname for six years, then felt it was time for me to return and get a job that was more long term and strategic. I saw the job at the Belgrade for Associate Director. The job excited me because there was a wide range of work, I didn’t want to go into something very specific after my diverse job in Suriname.

Janthi Mills, General Manager

What is your role in the Belgrade?

Largely to oversee the general management of the theatre with a specific responsibility for the Community & Education Company. The latter involves being in charge of the finance and personnel operation of the department and, in collaboration, with the Associate Director (responsible for Community & Education) working on the strategic vision for the company. Across the Belgrade Theatre as a whole, I look after Human Resource issues, such as contracting, any personnel queries, generally ensuring everyone is working within the law, everyone is getting the fees they should be paid and working the correct hours.

How did you find yourself in this position?

I did work experience at West Yorkshire Playhouse and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Up to that point I did want to be an actor, but I enjoyed doing the work experience on the operational side. A lot of people think there is only one way into the theatre, and that is to be an actor. I did a Performing Arts degree, and through the degree I began taking on an administrative role. When we were working on projects I would be the one looking after marketing or looking after the budget.

After University, I was vice president of my student union, I was also editor of my student newspaper. In this role I made sure I went and reviewed shows, I got to know people in the theatre. A job then came up about encouraging new people into the theatre. I moved my way up through Derby Playhouse and I ended up managing a whole programme of audience development work. Whilst I was there I did an Advanced Certificate in Arts Marketing. My qualification at University was quite practical, so it was good to get an administrative qualification to underpin my undergraduate degree.

The job then came up at the Belgrade. I really wanted to stay at a rep theatre because I’m really passionate about producing work in a city for a city. I knew about the Belgrade’s history because of Theatre in Education (TIE). Hamish Glen, the Artistic Director, has a great reputation and I knew people that had worked with him, and the Community & Education Company seemed to be really integral to what the theatre was doing. I also wanted a step up to being a manager of a department, whereas in the old position I was managing a few people but not a whole department. I can’t imagine doing anything else. If I have a bad day I think maybe I should go and work somewhere that doesn’t take as many hours, but there is nowhere else that I want to work!

What’s your favourite part of the job, and what’s the bit that you would prefer not to do?

My favourite part is creating something new. People joke about the administrative part of theatre being the boring side, but it’s integral to putting a show on the stage. I feel incredibly passionate about being part of what goes on the stage. I could do a budget somewhere else and it would not mean anything to me, whereas here I know it’s about what goes on, on that stage. I like supporting people, I like supporting the organisation to create amazing pieces of work that can change people’s lives.

There was plenty of opportunity at the Belgrade for long term strategy. The Artistic Director wanted to grow the work and make it accessible to marginalised groups and as a priority wanted to build links with the black and minority ethnic groups. It felt like an obvious next step, back in a producing theatre.
If you were going to give advice to people who wish to have a career in the theatre, what would your advice be?

Don't be afraid to show that you are passionate about something. It's a tough job, you've got to love it. People say that about acting, but I think it's about every job in the theatre, and there are a million people that want to be involved in it. If you just think 'it's an easy place to work, you get to see a few plays', then this job won't work out. But if what you do is theatre, then be passionate about that. Get some voluntary experience too, put your all into it, and get to know people.

What is your future ambition?

I want to be an Executive Director of a producing theatre. I definitely want to be in charge, but in charge with a team that are brilliant. Like here everyone really knows their department and knows how to work within it, it's about bringing all those elements together. We're in really hard financial times, so it's about keeping theatre alive and making sure it doesn't fall by the wayside. It would be really easy just to keep churning out the same thing because there's no money to create something new, so it's great being in an organisation that creates opportunities.

David Jane, Commercial Director

What is your role in the theatre?

I am the Commercial Director, which means I am responsible for fund raising through trusts, foundations, businesses and individuals, conferences and events, front of house, catering and anything VIP.

How did you find yourself in that role, what was your career path?

I went to university and initially started doing a combined degree of Drama and English because I wanted to be a drama teacher, and at that time there were very few drama teachers out there. I got to the end of my first year and realised I hated reading! So I decided to drop English. I did Drama, Psychology and a year of Philosophy. It was great fun. I carried on working on the bars for two days a week. I also worked on the bars and front of house in the evenings.

After I graduated from University, there were no jobs in the theatre so I went and worked for a newspaper in their accounts department, which was awful. I carried on working on the bars for about nine months until a job came up in the Marketing Department, as sales group coordinator. I applied for it and got that job. Then I became marketing officer. At that time, The Derngate was merging with the Royal. We were making a lot of staff redundant because there wasn't the need for two entire theatre's worth of staff, so we had a recruitment freeze. We were also just about to begin a capital build project and we had already started fundraising for it when the person that had been there as the Fundraising and Events Manager left. Because of the recruitment freeze, they couldn't bring anybody into post, so I was asked if I would temporarily step into the job so they could get started on the fundraising rather than wait the six months and lose that opportunity. So I did that 'temporarily' for five years. As Development Manager, I went through a fifteen million pound fundraising campaign and refurbishment. A month before they opened I moved to the Belgrade, which was a big change because I had done all of this work happen and I had been through all the rubbish that goes with it.

So I joined the Belgrade as Head of Development to oversee the end of the forty million pound programme we had here, but also to set up fundraising going forward as there wasn't anything here at all. There had been very little, the odd trust application for Community work and a little sponsorship when it happened to fall into their lap, but nothing had been set up. So the main focus of my job was to set all this up.

At the beginning of this year I took on the responsibility of Operations and also asked to take on Catering when the last Marketing Director left. I was already dealing with them a lot through conferencing anyway so I saw it as a good way of broadening out my experience.

What would you say is the worst part and the best part of your job?

The best part is the relationships and negotiations with different people. Everything that is done from my office really relies upon other people's goodwill. Things like Conferencing and Events. We are not at a conference centre, we are a theatre. It takes a lot of goodwill from Production, Front of House, Box Office, from everybody to make it work as well as it does. We are the bane of people's lives. The relationships that are built out of these favours is something that I love about this job and I would never want to lose that side of it.

Working with businesses is something I think theatres, or people who work in theatre, are often a bit nervous about getting involved with. I don't know whether this is a sense of not wanting to get their hands dirty or if there is confusion about what businesses do. I really enjoy those relationships with businesses.

What is the worst part of my job? There's a lot of paperwork involved and administration. It can, at times, become extremely all encompassing. But honestly enjoy my job and there isn't a bit of it that I would want to get rid of.

If you were going to give anyone advice to break into the theatre, what would that be?

Show willing, put the time in. If you're at university, if you're at school put the hours in volunteering. It is such a hard industry to get into... and it's even harder to get out of. But you have to show that you are willing to do your time before you actually get paid to do it. Certainly those two words work experience did save the best use of two weeks I ever had, because it got me a career. For the vast majority of jobs, especially the administration side of theatre, there is no course you can go on.

And what is your ambition, what's your dream job?

I know exactly what my last job will be, but I don't know what happens between now and then. My final destination, my last ten or fifteen years as I lead myself mercifully into retirement, will be as Executive Director of Theatre by the Lake in Keswick. It's pretty specific, I am relying on people leaving at exactly the right time. I was brought up in the Lake District, so it would be an opportunity for me to go home. It is such a beautiful and vibrant theatre, and it does some fantastic drama. The offices overlook the lake and the mountains, I can't imagine a better view out of an office window. That's where I'll end up.
Lori Ford, Assistant to the Production Manager

How did you get to the position of Assistant to the Production Manager at the Belgrade?

I started in Youth Theatre here at The Belgrade, which I was in for seven years. I left in 1999. I then went on to College to study Media. I didn’t want to do Theatre Studies or Performing Arts because I’d realised that when I was in Youth Theatre, or coming to the end of Youth Theatre, acting wasn’t for me so I did Media there. I then went on to university and did a two year degree in Communication, Culture and Media because that covered a lot of film production and set design. Once I had graduated, I thought to myself where would I like to be? It was here (The Belgrade) because it was such a big part of my life when I was younger and I just knew that I wanted to start my career here. So I came in and asked if I could do some work experience in the marketing department. I was putting posters up for free for three weeks and then they asked if I would like to be paid for it, bearing in mind I had about twenty other jobs elsewhere as you do when you’re a student. So I did a bit of that for a few weeks, and then I did a few shifts on box office which I really enjoyed. Then ushering. I was putting posters up during the day and then working box office. I was in between the three jobs, and then a position became available in the Community & Education Company. That was the department I was most familiar with anyway because I knew how they worked. Though it had changed an awful lot since I was in it.

There was a big shift in the Company and they lost their administrator. I left marketing, the box office and ushering behind to move more toward the production and administration areas, which I knew I was quite good at anyway. I was then Youth Theatre Coordinator. A full time position became available in Production, which I managed to get and I haven’t looked back since. I started as Production Assistant, then became Production Administrator, and over the last few years I have gained more experience and worked up to Assistant to the Production Manager.

What does Assistant to the Production Manager do?

Essentially there’s an awful lot of admin in it. You have to make sure the budgets that are issued are put in the right places, which are in collaboration with the Management. I then have to make sure that when the Heads of Departments are spending on those budgets, the spend goes into the correct areas. I have to make sure that they have everything they need to do their job, whether that is money or tools. I have to ensure that the scheduling is all done and that everything is on time. And make sure that the Designers and the Creative Teams are satisfied.

What’s been the high and lows of your career so far?

I love being in a tech week (the week where the production moves from the rehearsal room to the stage), even just as an assistant it’s a great feeling. I have covered the odd production management shift here and there. It’s really daunting because the Director, the Designer and the Creative Team expect so much from you and you’ve got to deliver what they want. It’s scary but it excites me at the same time, and that’s exactly why I do it. I just love making sure that it all comes together.

And what is your career ambition?

I would love to be a full Production Manager. I am very organised and I can do the administration side. I would like to be more of a hands on Production Manager. I would like more technical experience. Simple things like going on rigging courses and learning backstage stuff, because that’s not the route I took into Production Management. Many others could have come in in different ways, being stage crew, for example, and working their way up and learning the stage trade, which I don’t have entirely. I’ve picked up a lot of stuff along the way but I’d like to be a Technical Production Manager. I definitely want to stay in a theatre, it’s got to be theatre. Although outdoor events, theatrical outdoor events, excite me.
Stages through the Ages

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Belgrade Community & Education Company

For more information on the projects we work on please contact on 02476 846 741 or email on communityadmin@belgrade.co.uk

Stages through the Ages
A history of performance in Coventry

For the Community & Education Company

Associate Director
General Manager
Programme Co-ordinator
Drama Worker (Acting Out)
Drama Worker (BME)
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Administration Assistant

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