John Russell Brown

Tomorrow's Theatre – and How to Get There from Today's

Taking a wide-ranging look at the aesthetics and economics of theatre on both sides of the Atlantic, and highlighting the increasing interest in learning about theatre in the educational sphere at a time when institutional theatre appears to be floundering, John Russell Brown here draws on his own visits over the past decade to traditional and contemporary theatres in China, India, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia to suggest how new approaches to and locations for theatre might build on forms which continue to draw audiences worldwide. John Russell Brown founded the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts at Birmingham University, and for fifteen years was an Associate Director of the Royal National Theatre. His *New Sites for Shakespeare: Theatre, the Audience, and Asia* was published by Routledge in 1999. His articles on Asian theatres and their influence in Europe and America have appeared in recent years in *New Theatre Quarterly* and several Indian journals. He edited and contributed to *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre* (1995) and has been General Editor of the 'Theatre Production Studies' and 'Theatre Concepts' series, both for Routledge. This article is based upon his inaugural lecture at Middlesex University, where he is currently Visiting Professor.

AT A TIME of change when the existence of a number of institutions is threatened, thought should be given to the future of theatre. However uncertain and inscrutable that proves to be, speculation can be based on its nature as an art, what can be discovered of its past, and what is presently on offer. A start can be made by considering what is happening in theatre now on both sides of the Atlantic.

Simon Bowen's *Free* provides a suitably recent and independent sample. Performed in a temporary hundred-seat theatre smartly rigged up in one of the National Theatre's upper foyers, this first play by a new writer had the advantage of a long list of wealthy sponsors; its eight actors were all gifted and experienced; and its tickets were heavily subsidized at a maximum of £12 each. The published text[1] ends with an episode that goes like this:

ALEX Ben

BEN Yeah.

ALEX . . . I don't know

BEN You wanted to say something

ALEX Yeah

BEN What was it.

ALEX I don't know. There must be something –

BEN Must there.

ALEX All this shit's happened. There must be something to say.

BEN Must there.

Beat.

What.

ALEX I don't know.

BEN Me neither.

Beat.

Let's say goodbye.

ALEX Yeah. Okay.

BEN Goodbye.

ALEX Goodbye.

Beat.

BEN Let me know how you are.

They look at each other.

That is a taste of how theatre finds itself at present. Produced under very favourable circumstances, a ninety-minute performance was able to draw out this tentative encounter for rather longer than on television. The unremarkable words are presented on the

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page with considerable finesse. Besides marking three pauses and calling for small-scale activity – '*They look at each other*' – four speeches finish without final punctuation and one with a dash; another has an ellipsis before its start. No speech is longer than one short line of type, three are printed as two separate sentences.

Underneath this simple-seeming text, in an exactly directed performance, a threat of violence was almost always present as eight variously successful and damaged persons 'ricochet around the metropolis', two or three at a time, restless and unappeased, concerned with what they want at the moment. They think about the future only to wonder 'what the fuck' it might be.

Free finished its run of fourteen performances on 8 June 2002, but it was not an isolated phenomenon. In the same season the few new plays that were produced on Broadway also displayed an individual sense of unease. Susan-Lori Parkes's *Topdog/Underdog* and Edward Albee's *The Goat* were small-cast plays accessible enough to draw large audiences and win awards for dramatists and star actors. Some speeches were extended and fanciful, some of the action visually impressive and violent; and yet, in common with *Free*, the horizons offered were little wider than those of the stage, and the feelings no deeper. At the same time, Broadway was more busy reviving old plays, rejigging films as musicals, and presenting elderly actresses in solo shows about themselves, in which they were expected to perform as they had always done previously.

New British plays of more substance and longer stage-life than *Free* have often had titles expressing modish ennui or disdain and, occasionally, a more personal anguish or fantasy: recently, for example, *Closer*, *Shopping and Fucking*, *My Zinc Bed*, *Humble Boy*. In this company, *Free* is an ironic title, expressing a wish to escape, not a concern with political or intellectual liberty. English-speaking theatre seldom advertises its wares proudly and boldly, as it used to do with *The Way of the World*, *The Alchemist*, *Tamburlaine the Great*, or *As You Like It*. Even symbolic or comprehensive titles such as *The Seagull*, *A Doll's House*, *The Crucible*, *The Homecoming*, or *Jumpers* are beyond present aspirations. Titles as definitive as *Galileo*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, or *Look Back in Anger* are not common currency.

New Initiatives, Outworn Criteria

The lack of confidence demonstrated in this very selective tally of unreliable evidence is found more openly advertised by established theatrical institutions. Disaster signs have been erected on all sides. As the last century came to its end, the Arts Council of England commissioned a report on the roles and functions of some fifty regional theatres and then issued a document called *The Next Stage*, announcing that theatre faced a 'crisis'. Audiences had become smaller, productions both smaller and fewer. Overdrafts were getting larger, bankruptcies imminent. The risk-taking necessary for artistic enterprise was becoming less common.

The Council called for a 'National Policy' that would renew theatre, starting with an increase in subsidy of 10 or 20 per cent above inflation. Regional Arts Boards, the 'entertainment industry unions', the 'relevant industry lead bodies', and local government were all rallied to refine this document's 'framework' for a new national policy. After much talk in committees and between committees, the government granted the additional subsidy and initiatives were 'identified'.

Theatre had gained a more active paymaster that would issue orders and pass them down through subordinate authorities. The London Arts Board, for example, marked out 'four priority areas: Access, Education, Production and Distribution, and Investment in Artists'. Bureaucrats and accountants were to control theatres and require the art to ape industry and commerce.

Some good may come of all this, but any change will be within the same organizations and use the same producing agencies as before. New initiatives and emergent talents will not get support unless they satisfy the judgment of committees on which sit the very persons who have been in charge during theatre's decline. Rather than identifying

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what draws and holds audiences by its own achievement or promoting what is independent and unprecedented, official policy is directed towards the survival of what already exists, encouraging theatres to operate more efficiently and sell their wares to a wider public. This is how an established commercial business might polish its image and boost its profits, only with fewer committees making decisions and fewer political strings being attached.

The Response at the RSC

Two years after the publication of *The Next Stage* is too soon to assess its effect but already we can see what this industrial and bureaucratic policy has achieved at Britain's two national theatres. More in the public eye than regional theatres and with larger financial resources, the artistic directors of the Royal Shakespeare and the Royal National Theatres have acted boldly during the last few years. Adrian Noble, in charge at Stratford, announced a thorough makeover as if he had listened to Arts Council officers or members of his Board with big-business experience.

The company would capitalize on its brand name and diversify the use of its resources. No longer would there be a continuing company of actors accumulating experience together and developing their skills. Possession of a long-term home base would not be allowed to limit activities. Instead of alternating between large-scale productions on the main stage and more adventurous work on two smaller ones, actors would be in two or three shows and taken on tour to selected towns in Britain and abroad, each with a different stage and different audiences. New initiatives would include workshops in universities, usually in the United States where money is available to buy in temporary prestige events. In Stratford a training 'academy' would be established that would, in the space of only a few months, deliver small-scale productions using its inexpensive student-actors. The 1930s headquarters would be demolished and a commercial leisure complex built on its site, artfully called a 'village'. This would house educational demonstrations, entertaining side-shows, and outlets for customized merchandise. In London, the Barbican Theatre would be abandoned and productions dispersed to several theatres.

Designed to 'make money' and enhance the public profile of the parent firm, all this was in line with the priorities of the London Arts Board: 'Access, Education, Production and Distribution, and Investment in Artists.' And in practice, very quickly, this strategy proved disastrous. A declared loss of £1.3 million was projected to rise to £1.8 m in 2002–2003 but, with half-empty theatres, this was probably optimistic.[2]

The unquantifiable costs of diversification threatened to be still more disastrous, especially for a theatre founded to stage Shakespeare's plays to the best of its ability. So much of proven value was to be jettisoned that strikes threatened and, less easy to outface, a chorus of authoritative voices rose up in very public protest. Equivocation and sales-speak to a parliamentary committee and the Arts Council had failed to answer basic questions about the theatre's operation and function. Two play directors under contract resigned, soon to be followed by the Artistic Director himself; all plans had to be frozen and a search begun for a new director. The policy of industrial improvement had endangered the company at its heart by affecting what happens on stage and among audiences, the essence of any theatre.

The Response at the National

The Royal National Theatre went another way to work. Three years ago, seeing trouble ahead, senior management spent two days secluded in a hotel close to Gatwick airport and drew up a list of objectives. Productivity had fallen: during the first three weeks of September 1977, by which time all three auditoria were in full operation, the National's repertoire had contained nine new productions; but in 2001, during the same three weeks, only four new productions were on offer, this small output boosted by one visiting production and one revival from the previous year.

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Although a new Development Department had recently raised £2,077,000 from private and commercial sponsors (one-eighth of total income for 1999–2000), the theatre's finances remained insecure: the deficit for 1977–78 had been £129,971; for 1999–2000, it was £291,000, despite the halving of output.[3] But the managers were most troubled by the absence of new plays in the repertoire – four had been among the nine of 1977 – and the absence of young people in their audiences.

When the National first opened its doors on the South Bank, a poster proclaimed to every passer-by, 'The New National Theatre is Yours' and, constitutionally, that was true, and still is true today. In practical terms, however, the new theatre was chiefly to benefit a small band of middle-class persons with easy access to central London and a variable number of occasional visitors. As in good commercial practice, a Marketing Department, intent on maximizing sales, had enrolled a Mailing List of patrons willing to pay for booking privileges and the theatre had come to rely on these customers of settled habits and enough money to be frequent theatregoers. After thirty years in its new building, there was little sign that a younger generation was ready to take over from these privileged beneficiaries.

In response to these problems, after several sessions with its Board, the National announced a summer season consisting entirely of new plays and with all tickets priced at £8 for anyone under the age of 25. The small Loft theatre was created – where *Free* was produced – and the Lyttelton's capacity reduced from 890 seats in balcony and stalls, to 650 seats arranged in a continuous rake so that persons on the upper level would not feel so remote from the stage. Some difficulties were encountered at once. Mailing-list subscribers and regular patrons booked many of the seats, limiting the size of a new and younger audience. In the Loft, I found myself sitting next to an actor's agent who had flown in from LA, with an empty seat on my other side. In the Lyttelton, remodelled to be more intimate, leading actors were wearing small radios in order to hear or be heard adequately.

Worse still, as someone in the planning process must have foreseen, any young person, encouraged to make a first visit to the National, is not likely to return in ordinary circumstances, when tickets would be three or four times more expensive and the repertoire pleasing to older and more conventional audiences. Only a huge rise in subsidy could allow the low-priced tickets and concentration of new plays to continue; and, if such money were to be granted, every other theatre in the land would protest vigorously and demand equal treatment.

In response to the theatre's 'crisis', the National had opted for a short and sharp innovation, privileged and financially unsustainable. Mick Gordon, the successful director of a tiny and under-financed fringe company, had been brought in and asked to dream as 'if budget were no object' and then to produce the season accordingly.[4] A short-term effort will leave the National with none of its permanent problems solved: performances and audiences, the two essentials of any theatre, will remain very much the same as they were before.

The Larger Picture

During this 'give-away' summer sale, the National also opened a new production of the *Bacchae* in the Olivier Theatre, directed by Sir Peter Hall. With live music composed by Sir Harrison Birtwistle, its three principal actors supported by a fifteen-member chorus, twenty-two on-stage attendants, and twice the normal rehearsal time, this ancient Greek tragedy was offered as an especially 'timely' play in which an entire society could see 'its own reflection'.[5] When I saw it soon after opening, the theatre was little more than half full, neither play nor publicity having drawn a big enough crowd to turn the performance into a sought-after, truly public, and socially relevant event. No other theatre is likely to have done better with this play, although several might have staged it at smaller cost.

Theatres in London's West End have always relied on good commercial practice in pursuit of substantial profits for producers and landlords. In recent years, however, their

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risks have become greater and now successful shows are first produced, tested, and developed in subsidized and loss-making theatres; sometimes co-productions gain more direct advantage from state subsidy. Many of the actors and writers on whom the West End relies have first worked in regional theatres, film, and television, developing their skills and strengthening their talents.

Although, from time to time, some companies make large profits, none of them can truly be said to stand on their own feet or provide a viable source for tomorrow's theatre. Even small-scale and maverick companies survive by public subsidies or by paying less than a living wage. Although production costs are usually minimal and bureaucracy less of a burden, long tours are needed to secure sufficient audiences to meet expenses. Working hard in precarious conditions, membership tends to be youthful and the companies short-lived; the most successful join up with a larger well-subsidized or commercial management, and quickly absorb other habits, so that their methods of production become indistinguishable from those to which they were once opposed.

To thrive in British theatre in the new century, theatre companies of all kinds are trying to become more efficient, find larger audiences, make money, and claim more subsidy. Somehow, most will survive but future problems have not been solved, either by promoting original plays or by lengthy exploration of famous ones. New theatre spaces, industrial working practices, industrious fringe activities, expensive productions, and short-termed seasons have all been tried and have failed to answer theatre's acknowledged crisis. Even bigger subsidies seem to have had little effect. All this should not be a surprise: theatre history and theatre theory tell us that more basic solutions are needed, that practice of the art will have to change, reforming theatre's organization, production methods, performances, and audiences.

The Transatlantic Situation

Across the Atlantic, in a larger and more wealthy country, much the same problems have been met with the same blockages and inertia. There, too, official enquiries and nationwide consultation have raised the alarm: theatres are short of money, audiences are aging and diminishing, 'both public and private support for arts institutions' are in decline.[6] Despite new technology, sales drives and agonizing re-appraisals, theatre in the USA finds itself stranded, out of the main current of national concerns, and, except for a few ageing mega-musicals, untouched by global expansion.

Yet somewhat different recipes for renewal have emerged over there. In 1993, with actress Jane Alexander as its new Chairman, the National Endowment for the Arts began nearly four years of consultation about the state of all the arts – theatre was not considered on its own – and this led to a publication called *American Canvas* that asked for nothing less than 'the redefinition of American culture': all the arts should work together; community needs should be met by amateurs as well as professionals; young persons and children must be educated in the arts and the 'Information Age' entered on all fronts. The 'nonprofit arts' should seek permanent funding, not occasional grants.[7] They were told to:

> Identify new revenue streams that might be developed in the public sector: . . . Does the community have a cultural plan? Is there a percent-for-art program in place? A united arts campaign? [A] hotel-motel tax? (p. 164)

Effort is wider in range and financial considerations more dominant than in Britain, but, again, bureaucracy and consultation have not, or could not, address the truly basic problems: the quality of what happens on stage and the response of audiences.

Independent theatres struggle for survival in America, very much as they do in Britain, except that the scale of operation is often larger and the risks greater. A Broadway producer is reputed to have spent $700,000 on workshops to test a projected musical and, when he subsequently cancelled the production, was pleased that he had not lost the seven million dollars that would have been the cost of a full staging.

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With sums like these involved, a sense of theatre's importance briefly registered more widely when the terror of 11 September emptied the theatres of Manhattan: the city bought tickets for the most successful Broadway shows and gave them away in order to bring life back to the streets, shops, and public services, and so save many other investments. The small theatres in New York City received none of this help, although they too had been emptied of audiences; they make little impression on the lives of most New Yorkers and so get almost nothing from the public purse.[8]

The Necessity for Change

In the last few decades, changes in technology, thought, and social habits have been so great and so rapid that none of the arts can adapt easily. Theatre is the most severely damaged because it needs many resources and involves many different people; and, above all, because it is a public art that confronts and engages with an audience. As our lives and minds have changed in almost every aspect, so theatre must change, and change utterly. It must adapt to rapid and cheap transport, instant communication across continents, easy access to information: a world in which large organizations have more extensive power and maintain closer surveillance than ever before, a world of global commerce and global issues, of changing intelligence, awareness, and self-knowledge, of new social and sexual relationships.

Theatre has to compete for attention with electronic media that accustom us to viewing persons who live in great luxury or are unusually gifted and also – sometimes at the next moment – to watching helplessly as others endure unrestrained violence, poverty, ignorance, and other forms of human misery. We have all made huge adjustments to what we think and how we feel. Looking at films or photographs, even the youngest will recognize differences in behaviour and mind-set between the last two or three generations of a single household.

Theatre is in special danger of getting out of step with its public because to change would mean re-inventing itself, devising new wheels within the wheels of a complicated mechanism. Theatre is biased towards traditional ways of operating because they seem to offer security – new plays are produced in old ways, young actors absorbed into old companies – but today's theatre will have to be bolder and more imaginative if it is to survive for tomorrow. Only by making very basic changes will it be able to hold a mirror up to our lives and, once more, draw crowded audiences to share the fierce intensities and enjoy the pleasures of its illusions. Then, perhaps, we might all awaken with a heightened awareness of our present predicament.

The Paradox of the Education Sector

While many kinds of theatre are at risk, another is thriving on both sides of the Atlantic as educational theatre copes with a boom and expands rapidly. Courses in Drama, Theatre, Acting, and Performance are over-subscribed; in Britain during the year 2000, applications rose by 11.5 per cent.[9] In 2001, the University of Ulster accepted 25 students compared with 10 or 12 a few years previously; Surrey Roehampton, a recently re-organized institution, has accommodated 180 students. At Columbia University in New York, a lecture course which had a dozen students in 1998 had over 50 in 2002; for one seminar, in the same years, numbers rose from 6 to 18.

While professional theatres founder, in universities more Departments of Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies are being founded. New facilities have been built and, where these cannot be afforded, teaching may take place in a gymnasium, garage, cellar, hut, stable, or other unlikely place – at one university I have taught in, a converted pig-sty, so urgent is the demand for space. And this trend appears to be world-wide: Shanghai Theatre Academy received 2,500 applications five years ago and accepted 120; in 2002, applications numbered 5,100, of whom 150 were accepted; an eighteen-storied building has been erected for student accommodation.[10]

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As the tide of students continues to rise, many theatres send small teams of actors to work in schools and colleges where they can meet and perhaps influence tomorrow's audiences. Beginning with this initiative, they may, in turn, find much to learn from the experience of professional teachers. Although under present financial conditions universities can earmark little time or money for research, during some months each year faculty members can make themselves freer from immediate concerns than members of theatre companies or the writers and directors of plays, and can pursue projects of their own choice. Teachers make this effort because they need to engage in research for the intellectual well-being of themselves and their students; at all levels, enquiry is the lifeblood of universities.

Lessons from the Past

What, then, can be done by teachers and researchers for the sake of tomorrow's theatre? Firstly and obviously, the past should be studied in ways that relate to the present-day world and could influence current practice. Fortunately, the value of theatre history and archaeology has recently been demonstrated very publicly at the new Globe, the one large-scale theatre in Britain that plays a five-month season to near-capacity audiences and has no need of state subsidy.

As a reconstructed relic of a past made famous by Shakespeare's name and reputation, this theatre has the financial advantage of being a tourist attraction, but it has proved much easier to reproduce a building than to discover how best to use it. Perhaps inevitably, productions at the new Globe have seldom pleased everyone, least of all the experts, but a more serious failing is that very few actors have stayed long enough to build a company with a continuous experience of working together, as did the Chamberlain's and King's Men at the original Globe, and as the difficulties of acting Shakespeare require.

The most positive achievement of the rebuilding has been to establish an unusual and free relationship between audiences standing in its open yard and actors performing on its open platform-stage. This has proved a major attraction of seeing a play at this theatre, a new experience that has won such a large and varied audience that its popularity tomorrow seems to be assured.

Practical research and experiment will enable the opportunities of the new Globe to be more fully exploited, and the same is true of other ancient theatres that are still standing: the ancient amphitheatres in Greece and its former colonies; the countless halls of great houses and public buildings in which plays used to be staged intimately by candlelight. Professional theatre might return to all these locations if research could find how to stage productions that were fully and readily able to tour. Spectacular scenic effects can now be projected and their source contained within very small space; a stage could be assembled and dismantled in little time and at little expense.

City streets, squares, and courtyards, village greens, country parks, and gardens are still used occasionally for short plays and amateur productions in the open air, but these shows do not have to be small in either scale or effect. Practical research in staging and performance could seek ways to make productions sufficiently mobile to bring theatre into places where audiences live instead of being confined to a few buildings in the centre of cities.

Because texts by Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, Chekhov, and all the masters of past theatres are always available for scrutiny, they have attracted most attention from researchers and have been minutely analyzed and variously deconstructed. Linguistic, historical, cultural, political, psychological, and philosophical knowledge, along with all manner of personal experiences and beliefs, have strengthened the critic's grasp of their complexities and refined their responses.

But these texts, while rendering great intellectual satisfaction to solitary readers, are only a limited and shrunken reminder of once-living theatrical events that fed the imaginations of great concourses of people drawn from almost all sections of society.

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The original staging, actors, and audiences are all missing and, with them, the ways in which the dramatists' words came alive in performance, changing meanings and effectiveness as they contributed to an embodied and comprehensive illusion of life. Old plays are not easily staged today and only practical research that works with actors and audiences, as well as text, can stand a chance of discovering how the *Bacchae* or *King Lear* might once more be able to attract audiences of thousands.

Breaking Conventional Boundaries

Performance could sometimes be studied more profitably in popular theatres of other cultures than our own. The intention would not be to find how to copy or transplant them, as theatre directors already do in increasing numbers, but to search out the principles and practices that enable audiences to be held in rapt attention, ignoring the more readily available pleasures of film or television. How do the Jatra theatres of Bengal, Bangladesh, and Orissa function when they perform at night, from 11 p.m. until after dawn when thousands of spectators disperse to their daily work? How do some contemporary plays in Tokyo use music, song, and dance, as well as elements taken from circuses, ancient Kabuki theatre, films, videos, mass-market advertisements, stand-up comedy, and television chat shows? What rehearsal methods are used to create these plays that fill large theatres with young and metropolitan audiences?

A Patagonian theatre developed from carnival, Mexican performances exploiting the excitement of professional wrestling, African masquerades involving whole communities, Korean masked dramas satirizing social injustice and local politicians, the rituals, trances, and long narrations that draw present-day audiences in South and Central America, Africa and throughout Asia: these are among the varieties of theatre that thrive today beyond the reach of Euro-American culture and, if studied, could reveal ways to develop performances in our own cultural context that would confront forces at work in our society, tell our own stories, and celebrate our own lives and aspirations.

Much nearer home are other opportunities for practical research. Not attempting to imitate established theatres and companies, small groups of actors follow their own instincts, often with a writer, designer, technician, or director amongst them. They are likely to know little about accepted ways of making theatre and always have to discover and build their own audiences. They take risks, because they have little to lose, and so are able to attempt what more experienced theatres would not even consider. Although neglected by press and television and by established professionals, these inexperienced theatres are worth informed and patient enquiry at a time when the rudiments of theatre have to be sought out afresh.

In this country, Red Earth, based in Brighton and run by Caitlin Easterby and Simon Pascoe, often chooses to work in natural surroundings and under the changing sky. With fire and water, live music, and dance among its primary means, this theatre has drawn hundreds of spectators to the top of the South Downs for a celebratory performance. Perpetual Motion Theatre, based in London and run by Emi Slater, tours around the world to places as different as Korea, Egypt, Russia, and the United States. This small company, employing actors from different cultures and using different languages, verbal and physical, has worked on a single play for four years and is not entirely finished with it yet, even after a new show has been given its first performances.

In the United States, Collapsible Giraffe is run by three directors who are also the originators of their plays and among the actors in them. Having converted a garage in Brooklyn into its own performance-space, this company welcomes members of an audience individually and offers them free beer. Interaction between spectators and performers continues as the latter tackle obstacles set up especially for each occasion, accepting and utilizing whatever accident occurs. For this company, careful preparation and rehearsals are very different from performances which are always unprecedented

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and the time when excitement and discovery occur.

Project 400 is run by Diane Paulus and Randy Weiner who, after summer seasons in Door County, Wisconsin, are now settled back in Manhattan, with no permanent address or place of performance. Having been together as students, Diane went on to take courses in acting and directing while Randy started by recruiting dancers from the club scene in Boston for *Club 12*, his musical version of *Twelfth Night*. By good fortune able to play for one week in New York, this show earned enough money from film and theatre options to start the company off with a pot of money. *The Donkey Show*, a club version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* soon followed, visited Edinburgh and London, and is still playing three years later in a club in New York.

In April 2002, four actresses from earlier shows played three couples, male and female, Japanese and American, in *Swimming with Water Melons*, a show about what happened to GIs in occupied Japan. The story of Diane's parents provided the core of the action, which was staged with music and song (on the original recordings), quick scene changes, sharp dialogue, and interactions charged with personal memories and popular attitudes. At the very end, true-life facts and sentiment were invoked with an absolute minimum of theatricality.

In small-scale, under-financed theatres so much is exceptional that researchers armed with knowledge of theatre practice and critical understanding of plays, performance, and reception, can seek out the progress towards tomorrow's theatre that is being made unhindered by tradition and where success is, necessarily, precarious and seldom exploitable. Research cannot, by itself, renew theatre or tackle its present crisis, but it can assess the innovations that occur in relative obscurity, thereby establishing the need for change and some directions in which it might be sought. Seldom has theatre study had so much of immediate and practical interest to undertake.

And beyond this and, perhaps, of still greater significance are discoveries that can be made in the classrooms of schools, universities, and colleges. Why do young people press forward to learn about theatre when theatre is in crisis and employment opportunities scarce? What questions do they ask? What do they discover for themselves and show to other students who have other interests? Here is a crucible for change that involves both spectators and participants, that is not confined by commercial considerations and not easily intimidated by tradition or other people's successes.

Student performances will sometimes use everyday or street words to unusual effect, awaken fantasies not normally released, present action with an unassuming acceptance of emotion, tell stories that need to be told, and sometimes conclude them with brand new invention. In a classroom, with its own kind of energy and freedom, someone may be finding the means by which tomorrow's theatre will thrive and win back its public.

Notes and References

1. Simon Bowen, *Free* (London: Oberon Books, 2002), p. 118–19.
2. For an example of many press reports, see *The Times*, London, 5 July 2002.
3. All statistics from the National Theatre's Annual Reports.
4. For this and other details of the National's new-play season, see Robert Butler, 'New Writing at the National', in the programme for the *Bacchae,* Olivier Theatre, 8 May–8 June 2002.
5. Colin Teevan, the play's translator, in the National Theatre programme.
6. See Gary O. Larson, *American Canvas: an Arts Legacy for Our Communities* (National Endowment for the Arts, [1997–98]), p. 145. The view of regional theatre in the USA given here is based on this report. A more complete picture would include the success of some theatres in attracting funds from wealthy individuals and local businesses, a support that can restrict freedom to innovate and develop a more widely based audience.
7. Ibid., p. 162.
8. See *New York Times*, 6 January 2002.
9. As reported on 12 October 2000. See http://news.bbs.co.uk/hi/english/education/newsid.
10. Statistics from the departments concerned by personal enquiry.

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