TEN YEARS AT THE SHERMAN THEATRE
1990 - 2000

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A Generation Arises

Creating and developing a young people’s and
emerging artists’ strategy at the Sherman Theatre
Cardiff 1990 – 2000
There is no hope for Wales until a generation arises that knows its own past.
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Preface

This overview, in partnership with the physical portfolio, chronicles my work as Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, 1990 – 2000 and demonstrates how I invented, created and developed a young people’s and emerging artists’ policy and strategy in this regional theatre over a ten year period.

In 1990 I was appointed to the post to create and develop the Sherman Theatre as Wales’ premiere pioneering theatre for young people. Within this paper I will describe my practice over the ten year period, but I will also examine in detail my own artistic work in the year 1999 - 2000 with the aim of demonstrating how this period of work had particular relevance to young people. Within the study I will also investigate and explain some of my own personal working methods with artists when creating a theatre production.

In the late 1980s the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) in partnership with the (then) South Glamorgan County Council (SGCC), the two main funders of the theatre, and the theatre’s Board of Trustees employed Adrian Trickey, an independent arts consultant to prepare and present a feasibility study that investigated the possibility of the Sherman Theatre refocusing its policy and becoming a Young People’s Theatre for Cardiff with an all Wales remit. His findings and proposals were positive and his recommendations accepted. I was appointed in 1990 to spearhead the development and translate the theoretical recommendations into positive practice.

In 1999 I, in partnership with the senior management of the Sherman, recognised that the current funding levels of the theatre were far too low to sustain its artistic programme and the capital infrastructure of the building. We employed Peter Boyden, an independent arts consultant to work with us and advise the team in preparing a document for the Sherman’s Board of Trustees, the ACW and Cardiff County Council
(current funders) that clearly stated that the status quo operation at that time was not an option for sustainability of the Sherman Theatre.

This overview records and examines the years between the Trickey and Boyden reports (1990 – 2000).

This is a portfolio submission to the University of Glamorgan. The physical portfolio that accompanies this paper includes examples of artistic and administrative policy developments and practice.

This submission is therefore a personal investigation and records the creation, development and sustainability of a Young People’s Theatre and Emerging Artists Strategy within a regional theatre (Sherman Theatre) 1990 – 2000, and how it practically applied to a generation arising of young people and emerging artists.
Introduction

The primary purpose of these writings is to record and analyse the ten years work of artistic invention and the process of running the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, as Artistic Director and Chief Executive 1990 - 2000.

It is very rare in one's career to get the opportunity to create a new strategy and working practice for an organisation. For 15 years prior to my appointment as Artistic Director/Chief Executive of the Sherman Theatre, I had been working in Theatre-in-Education (TIE), Young People's Theatre (YPT) and Youth Theatre (YT) in England. My appointment to the new post gave me a unique opportunity to bring together my knowledge and experience to create Wales' first premier theatre for young people and emerging artists.

This overview is concerned with the ten years 1990 to 2000 when I ran the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff as Artistic Director and Chief Executive. Within the overview I have used the artistic work I created in the year 2000 as an illustrative case study of my artistic practice. Much of the overview chronicles my executive practice and artistic programming. I have also included a section on my artistic processes and practice when working with writers, actors, youth theatre practitioners and emerging artists in order to illustrate how I translate theory and artistic policy into practice when creating contemporary theatre and therefore demonstrate an equality of status between my executive and artistic practice.

This paper chronicles the objectives set by the Trickey Report of 1989/90, personal objectives I set complimentary to Trickey's recommendations and the process I pursued in achieving these recommendations through my artistic and executive practice.

This overview is concerned with the years 1990 to 2000 from the Trickey Report recommendations 1989/90 through to the recommendations of the

I have chosen to present the work chronologically because these writings chronicle the development of the policy over the ten years 1990 to 2000. By presenting the work chronologically, these writings will reflect the development of the policy culturally and politically between the Trickey report of 1989 and the Sherman (Boyden) report of 2000. Throughout the ten years it was important for me to create and develop partnerships. These writings set out to show how these partnerships were established and developed over the ten years with young people, artists, emerging artists and funding bodies.

The physical portfolio that accompanies this paper, contains the Trickey Report of 1989/90, the Three Year Appraisal report by the ACW in 1994 and the Boyden Report, ‘A National Young People’s Theatre for Wales’, 2000, along with the Sherman’s policies, marketing data, a portfolio of all the work that I produced as an artist, including scripts, videos, press packs, notebooks and numerous other documents.
Throughout this paper I refer to the content of this physical portfolio. It is therefore, presented in 3 boxes.

**Box One contains**

The administrative work of the Sherman 1990 – 2000 including policies, handbooks, marketing data, publicity and press, selections of grant applications and some of my published writings and interviews pertaining to the creation of a Young People’s strategy at the Sherman.

**Box Two contains**

A record of all the productions I directed at the Sherman in the ten years, a selection of notebooks pertaining to shows mentioned in the overview, the documents relevant to my shared vision with theatre practitioner, Michael Bogdanov towards a National Theatre Company for Wales and a selection of published plays commissioned and produced at the Sherman during this period.

**Box Three contains**

The scripts, notebooks, press packs, videos and tape recordings of the productions I created in 1999 – 2000 along with various CDs of the music published for certain productions and video recordings of television programmes made pertaining to certain productions.

A full list of the contents of each of these boxes can be found at the end of the overview.
Applying for the Job

- The Advert
- Why Apply for the Job?
- My Vision for the Sherman Theatre
- Why Wales? Why Cardiff?
The Advert

Sheffield, October 1989. It's a Monday morning and in the jobs' pages of *The Guardian* newspaper is an advert for Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, to invent, create and develop a young people's theatre policy. I'm excited and suddenly terribly ambitious.

I'm living and working in Sheffield, South Yorkshire and have been for six years. I'm the Director of Theatre-in-Education and Community at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield's repertory theatre. I'm an associate to the Artistic Director, Clare Venables.

I'm part of a team of Directors that Clare has created around her including Mike Kay, Steven Pimlott, Martin Duncan, Jane Collins and trainee director Stephen Daldry. It's a vibrant, challenging and exciting place to work. Venables' leadership is awesome, caring, inventive and inspiring. I am happy and creating strong artistic work on the main stage, in the studio theatre and on tour to schools and community venues locally, nationally and internationally. More importantly I'm content. My work is supported, challenged and celebrated.

I show the advert to Venables. There's no debate. I must apply. She will support me all the way through the process. I hadn't worked in Wales for 17 years and, to be honest, I hadn't ever really considered working in Wales. I was unaware of the arts and cultural agenda of the nation and all I really knew about Wales was that it had a thriving number of young people’s and community theatre companies and it was where I was born ... oh and my family still lived there.

I remember that advert in *The Guardian* vividly. The words ‘artistic director’ were exciting, whilst the words ‘chief executive’ were impressive but daunting. More importantly, perhaps was the challenge to run a regional theatre that specialised in work for young people; there was
something attractive about the status and the power of the job. I knew I wanted to lead a team, to create a big artistic programme, to put into practice everything I had learnt so far in my career and from working alongside Clare Venables and to be truthful, I was ambitious for that power.

If there is one thing that a job application does, is that it focuses you. You have to take stock of who you are, what you want and why you want it (I've always had the problem that I don't know what I want to be when I grow up).

So in the process of writing the job application you turn yourself and your existence upside down and inside out. You divide your ideals into the negative and the positive. You reassess your value and your worth. You realign your objectives for both life and career. You take stock. You face up. You attempt to put a value on your existence and place your whole self in the competitive job market with the concept of failure becoming the biggest threat to your value and success but the opportunity to succeed and create a vibrant and exciting theatre for young people is the dominant positive factor in your thinking process.
Why Apply for the Job?

Here was an opportunity to put into practice everything I believed in and cared about regarding theatre for young audiences and emerging artists. The chance to run a theatre building that placed young culture at the centre of its policy. For many years I had worked in regional repertory theatres in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Worcester, Sheffield, etc where the core activity had been adult theatre. These theatres were passionate about young people, but the artistic work for young people and young people’s participation through youth theatre remained at a lower status.

In the 1980s there had been a development in both the producing (the reps) and receiving theatres throughout Britain to expand their education departments. Predominantly this work had existed alongside the theatres marketing departments. It was, generally, a move for the theatres to find new younger audiences. This development existed as a reaction by the presenting and producing theatres to the invention and growth of the Theatre-in-Education (TIE) movement in the 1960s/70s across Britain that had invested in child centred learning and educational theatre. Gill Ogden in her article, ‘A History of Theatre-in-Education in Wales’ (Staging Wales) recognises this development.

Theatre-in-Education began in the mid 1960s as part of the post-war movement in Britain to widen the base and appeal of theatre, to rid it of its elitist overtones and create art forms that were accessible and relevant to people from different social backgrounds. The same movement that gave rise to community, alternative and Agit-prop theatre, like the earlier workers’ theatre movement, embracing the idea that theatre can and should be performed anywhere, at any time, led to the desire to take theatre into schools and to make it relevant to that audience’s needs and interests. At the same time, changes in the philosophy and theory of education meant a gradual introduction of more child-centred, heuristic techniques and the use of drama as a learning tool. Drama also began to be taught and examined as a subject in its own right in secondary schools and university departments, leading to an increase in numbers of young people trained and educated in theatre and eager to experiment with new forms.

(Taylor/Ogden, 1997, p47)
As a result of this investment in young people by the Theatre-in-Education companies, the producing and receiving theatres throughout Britain began to realise that they too needed to invest in young people/audiences.

The proposed new remit for the Sherman Theatre allowed me to construct a policy that placed young people’s theatre, education, youth theatre, emerging artists and young people themselves at the centre of its remit. This was an important development. The opportunity to create a theatre that had young people at the heart of its culture and young people’s theatre as a core primary activity was a completely different and challenging development. It was an exciting opportunity. A twelve month, year-on-year commitment, not just something for the kids at Christmas and summer holidays. It was also an opportunity to raise the status of my own work and that of theatre for young people.
My Vision for the Sherman Theatre

Here was a chance to dream. To bring together all my ambitions, experience, influences, knowledge and vision to a theatre dedicated to your people and emerging artists. It was important that that vision was focused, inspirational, practical, imaginative, challenging and achievable.

My personal ambitions to lead an organisation that empowered young people gave them status and encouraged them to find their democratic public voice within a safe environment sat alongside the knowledge I had acquired in the previous 15 years professional experience of working in young people’s theatre.

The iconoclastic German theatre maker Bertolt Brecht had commented:

There seems to be nothing to stop the theatre having its own form of ‘sport’. If only someone could take those buildings designed for theatrical purposes which are now standing eating their heads off in interest, and treat them as more or less empty spaces for the successful pursuit of ‘sport’, then they would be used in a way that might mean something to a contemporary public that earns real contemporary money and eats real contemporary beef.

(Brecht, 1926, p6)

These thoughts that had led to Brecht creating the Berlin Ensemble Theatre, and revolutionising the use of public theatres and ensuring that the ‘sport’ of theatre had a contemporary relevance to its audience.

Joan Littlewood, the pioneering theatre director of Theatre Workshop and the Stratford East Theatre in London was passionate about creating a ‘Fun Palace’ in the east end where the immediate community could choose what you want to do – or watch someone else doing it. Learn how to handle tools, paint, babies, machinery or just listen to your favourite tune. Dance, talk or be lifted up to where you can see how other people make things work. Sit out over space with a drink and tune into what’s happening
elsewhere in the city. Try starting a riot or beginning a painting – or just lie back and stare at the sky. We are building a short-term plaything in which all of us can realise the possibilities and delights that a 20th Century city environment owes us. It must last no longer that we need it.

(Littlewood, 1994, sleeve notes)

Both of these revolutionary theatre practitioners of the 20th Century questioned the fundamental role and function of theatre buildings in contemporary society. Theatres are complete communities. There are actors, painters, designers, audiences, administrators, financers, marketers, directors, carpenters, electricians, educationalists, cleaners, seamstresses, pattern cutters, workshop leaders, menders, joiners, fixers, musicians, writers, composers, cartographers, voice specialists, stage managers, typists, bar managers, cooks, waiters, telephonists and dreamers all working under one roof. This complete community of artists and artisans must share a common ownership of what they create. Everyone should have a sense of pride in the act of theatre that is produced. Like Brecht and Littlewood I wanted that act of theatre to have a relevance to the lives of its producers, and its receivers who ‘earn contemporary money’ and ‘eat contemporary beef’ in an environment where all of us, worker and audience ‘can realise the possibilities and delights’ of contemporary society.

I wanted to be able to put into everyday practice what I had learnt when working alongside educationalists such as Dorothy Heathcote (Newcastle-upon-Tyne University) and Gavin Bolton (University of Durham). Dorothy is a great lateral thinker. In her work there is never a problem only various solutions. She empowers young people to think laterally because, if you are not part of the solution, you are often the problem. In her book, *Dorothy Heathcote, Drama as a Learning Medium*, Betty Jane Wagner observes Heathcote’s lateral approach to life, and consequently drama.
Another of Heathcote’s goals is to help see some common objects in new ways. For example whenever she is trying to visualise a scene, she imagines what it would look like if she flew over it; brought it close to her or walked up to it; felt it; weighed it. She is interested in proportion and form . . . .

Another way she thinks is to reverse a response – when she is thinking of people afraid of ghosts, she turns it around and considers ghosts afraid of people. She sees people looking for ghosts and then ghosts looking for people. If a group of children want to do a play about dolls, she asks,

would you rather be people who don’t understand dolls or dolls who don’t understand people.

(Wagner, 1979, p224)

Dorothy’s endless search for possibilities and new different perspectives on life mirrored my desires to create a theatre that struggles for positive alternatives and resolutions.

Because of my professional theatre background in the TIE and Educational Theatre I wanted to develop the theatre’s relationship with its audience, and particularly young people. Heathcote placed young people at the centre of their own learning. I wanted to place young people at the centre of our Sherman Theatre. Heathcote taught me that the young people need a role and purpose within the drama. The challenge for me was to find a role and a purpose for young people within the Sherman Theatre as theatre makers, goers and watchers.

Gavin Bolton (University of Durham), on the other hand, had timely raised the status of drama within the academic and educational establishments. Alongside his passion for the empowerment of the child, the teacher, and the subject, he constantly assessed and reassessed the worth of educational drama.
The purpose of drama education is to develop the powers of the mind so that a 'common' understanding of life can be mastered. Common understanding cuts across the 'forms' of knowledge and is a rigorous way of approaching school subjects from the 'inside', rather than from the normal view of a subject as a collection of given knowledge.

(Bolton, 1984, p63)

To me, it has always been important to develop the minds of our audience when creating theatre. If you change the environment of the classroom to the professional theatre and youth theatre rehearsal room, then the practicalities of Heathcote's approaches and the analysis of Bolton's theories can be extremely exciting, threatening, dangerous and positive ways to develop contemporary theatre and 'a common understanding of life can be mastered'.

Another great influence on me had been to work alongside Clare Venables who was Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield. Her awesome leadership had ensured that there was always a strong sense of community and family within the theatre. She made no difference between work and play. Both fuelled the shows she created and the theatre she ran. Like Heathcote she asked you for your opinion. She invited you to share her visions, she encouraged you to be dangerous and inventive. She asked you to turn the world upside down and view it from many angles. She passionately cared about emerging artists. She insisted on training for all her staff ensuring that they stretched their boundaries into the unknown.

The Community Arts company, Welfare State, founded by John Fox in 1968, developed a unique synthesis of theatre, music, sculpture and spectacle, a celebratory theatre that reached popular audiences through remarkable combinations of archetypal and contemporary imagery. Fox was at the forefront of the community arts movement. His work fused
together art forms to create spectacle. In 1972 the Welfare State Manifesto stated:

We are artists concerned with the survival and character of the imagination and that individual within a technologically advanced society.

(Coult and Kershaw, 1983, p217)

By 1981 Fox renamed the company Welfare State International and one of the stated intentions of the company read:

To demonstrate the process of the imagination and the role of the hand-made expendable art work in advanced technological culture.

(Coult and Kershaw, 1983, p220)

What attracted me to the work of Welfare State was their determination to be popular and relevant within contemporary society and their mission to link the arts with the sciences. So often these two strands of society are seen as opposites and enemies. Welfare State’s work built bridges between the two worlds, and also within the arts world. Writing sat next to mask making, fine sculpture sat next to painting, lantern making sat next to performance and street parades sat next to dance.

Projects such as *Parliament in Flames* (October 1981) which played to over 15,000 audience in Lewisham and used fire, puppets, lanterns, sculpture and theatre performed by huge casts of professional and community performers, sat alongside *Tempest on the Lake* (May 1981) an island celebration based on themes taken from Shakespeare’s play for the Toronto Theatre Festival in Canada and *A Beach Carnival* (July 1981) in Ulverston, Cumbria and Sunderland, Tyne & Wear. All of Welfare State International’s work used diverse forms of performance, creativity and professional and community involvement. Their work started to put amateur alongside professional artists with a view to inclusion and involvement. You never watched a Welfare State show,
you were a part of it. Without you the performance or event didn't exist. You were a vital component within the occasion. These objectives and methods of working attracted me because I wanted to break down the same barriers within regional theatre and ensure that young people as artists, performers and audience members were equally valued and included within any one event. This philosophy and practice was to fuel such projects as *A Generation Arises* which I will talk about later in this paper.

Fox believed, and proved through the company's practice, that the imagination was inclusive and not exclusive.

> Engineers of the Imagination, a label that succinctly reflects the combination of technology, craft and art that the company deals in. It is the imagination, above all, that powers all the processes of rational and creative action that make up social living, and the transforming power of the imagination that makes change possible.

(Coultand Kershaw, 1983, p13)

I wanted to create a theatre that also built bridges between art and science and between the various art forms. I wanted a building of celebration and connection. So often young people have to make academic, and therefore life decisions between the arts or sciences. the Sherman would be a place that fostered tolerance and partnership between the arts and sciences celebrating both equally.

Joan Littlewood was passionate about the next generation.

> Popular education is declining and so is Government planning. We cannot afford to waste human talent. There is unexplored talent in each child. Let's get our priorities straight.

(Littlewood, 1994, p750)

With these influences I visualised a theatre that would be inclusive and not exclusive. It would welcome artists and audience. There would be a culture of equality, worth and respect. Young people would feel safe and comfortable on stage, in the audience, in the rehearsal room and in the
foyers. It would be a powerhouse for invention and new ideas. Its dialogue with its audience, actors and fellow workers would be stimulating, dangerous, disturbing and challenging. Its very existence, alongside its created on stage product would have a relevance to its community. We would create theatre on stages, in foyers, in the streets, on tour, in schools, in community centres, in special schools and in unexpected places. We would welcome all people regardless of their sex, race, gender, religion, creed, sexuality and ability into the theatre. We would celebrate humanity’s differences. We would develop strong lines of communication between the makers and receivers of theatre in as many ways as possible.

The Sherman would become a place to dream, and to celebrate the endless powers of the imagination.

I am an arts practitioner. I develop my theory through rigorous practice and learning which I share with my fellow practitioners. I am one cog in the wheel, but I am adamant that wheel will continue to turn. My vision was to offer leadership and positive inspiration from the boardroom to the rehearsal room, from the dressing room to the Welsh Office, from the stage to the auditorium, from the workshop to the foyer.

I wanted to create a building of possibilities.
Why Wales? Why Cardiff?

To be honest the location was immaterial, it was the content of the proposed mission and its ambition that excited me, it could have been anywhere, it happened to be Cardiff. England already had thriving children’s theatres with buildings such as Polka Children’s Theatre, Wimbledon, London and the Unicorn Theatre for Children based at the Arts Theatre in London’s West End and the Contact Theatre in Manchester. Wales had a thriving Young People’s Theatre (YPT) and Theatre-in-Education ((TIE) policy with eight touring companies, one each based in the eight counties of Wales, but no specialist, dedicated theatre building as in England. It was, therefore a challenge, an opportunity and the chance to establish a first for Wales.

I had a two day interview with the Board of Directors and staff of the Sherman Theatre along with representatives from the Arts Council of Wales. I was offered the post and in March 1990 I left the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield and took up the post of Artistic Director/Chief Executive of the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff.
The Job

- The Policy, Role and Function of the Sherman Theatre
- The New Job
- Developing a Philosophy Through Experience and Practice
The Policy, Role and Function of the Sherman Theatre

The Sherman Theatre in Cardiff has many roles to play within its community. The organisation is an independent theatre trust that relies on public funding from the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) and the local authority of Cardiff County Council (CCC). This public grant allows for roughly some 50% of the theatre's financial turnover. The other 50% is secured through box office sales and from investment from the private sector.

The Sherman Theatre is:

1. Home of the Sherman Theatre Company (STC) – South Wales’ only building based producing theatre company.

2. Home of the Sherman Youth Theatre (SYT).

3. A receiving and presenting house for bought-in professional drama, dance, comedy and opera.

4. A receiving and presenting house for amateur and community dance and drama.

5. An employer of 32 permanent staff.

6. A fast failing 1974 concrete structure which was originally built as a theatre for the then drama department of the University of Wales Cardiff. The drama department was disbanded in 1987 and the building was bought from the university by ACW and run by an independent trust – the Sherman Theatre Trust Ltd.
1. **Home to the Sherman Theatre Company (STC)**
   The Sherman Theatre Company (STC), based at the Sherman, is the producing theatre in South Wales. Its policy is to produce professional theatre for young audiences in Cardiff and where financially possible nationally, throughout Wales and internationally. The company prioritises new writing working with the writers of Wales to produce new work for stage, radio and television.

2. **Home of the Sherman Youth Theatre (SYT)**
   In order to create a young people’s theatre policy for a building it is important, and indeed essential, that the policy is inclusive in what it presents and what it makes. It is therefore necessary that alongside the presenting and producing professional programme that an active, child/youth centred hands-on youth theatre activity is central to the building’s purpose.

3. **A receiving and presenting house for bought in professional drama, dance, comedy and opera**
   A significant role of the Sherman Theatre is in presenting professional performance for the community. We therefore had a healthy mix of drama, dance, opera and comedy within each season (three seasons a year). (See Season Brochures in portfolio, box two)

4. **A receiving and presenting house for Amateur and Community Drama and Dance**
   As part of its continuing relationship with the community, the Sherman presents drama and dance from the amateur and community companies. This work falls into three areas, 1) amateur theatre, 2) schools, 3) higher education.
Amateur work
Essentially the Sherman had a working relationship with a number of production companies including Everyman Theatre, Cardiff Little Theatre, Mirage Theatre Company, Llandaff Musical Society and the Parc and Dare Theatre Company.

Schools
The Sherman hosts the Cardiff Schools Dance Association’s annual presentation and also works with Rubicon Dance Centre, Cardiff.

Higher Education and Emerging Artists
The theatre regularly presents work by the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (Cardiff), University of Glamorgan, Drama and Media department, Act One (Cardiff University Drama Society) and of course its own youth theatre productions. We occasionally present and work from other youth theatres in Wales and have worked in partnership with the Drama Association of Wales (DAW).

(See Seasons Brochure in portfolio box two)

5. **An employer of some 32 permanent staff and many freelance staff per annum**
The Sherman is a major arts employer in the capital city. Alongside its permanent staff of administration, marketing and technicians, the Sherman only actually employs three permanent artists, the Artistic Director, the Associate Director and the Director of Youth Theatre. All the other artistic posts of Designers, Writers, Lighting Designers, Actors, Stage Management, Choreographer, various specialists, etc are employer on a freelance basis.

(See staffing handbook/staff titles in portfolio box one)
6. **A failing building structure**

The theatre was built in 1974. Now over 30 years old its physical structure and fabric is failing. It demands vast sums of money in maintenance to ensure the building can be legally open and fit for purpose.

It is a very basic building. There are no offices (it was a university department therefore all offices were in the main university building). It has poor access and facilities for people with physical disability, both as audience members and as performers/workers.

A major financial investment is needed in refurbishing the building. It is Cardiff’s only middle-scale theatre. It is Cardiff’s only modern theatre building. It is Cardiff and South Wales’ only producing theatre.
The New Job

March 1990: I start the new job. I’m number one, everyone looks to me, the staff, the Arts Council, the Local Authority, the Board, the theatre community, the media, the profession, the community.

Who is he? What’s he done? Where’s he from? Is he Welsh? Does he speak Welsh? Will he learn? What are his politics? What are his policies? Can he direct? How long will he be staying? Is he passing through? Is this just a career move? Is he interested in local actors, writers, artists? Does he do new writing? Does he know anything about Welsh theatre? Does he know anything about Wales?

There is an energy inside you when you are at the beginning of something.

Let us not forget the Art of the Beginner

Chinese Proverb

It’s that energy, excitement, optimism, and invention that helps you answer all the questions that people throw at you. For the first six months of a new job you are still in the interview. There are often no definites at the start of something new, but there are often lots of ‘ifs.’ I often think that I live in the world of ‘what if.’ It’s a great, optimistic and exciting place to live. Peter Brook says:

In everyday life, ‘if’ is a fiction, in the theatre ‘if’ is an experiment. In everyday life ‘if’ is an evasion, in theatre it is the truth.

(Brook, 1968, p157)

It was with this philosophy that I started my new job.

By the mid-late 80s, the Sherman Theatre as a producing and receiving venue was failing financially and artistically. In 1988, the Trust, in partnership with the Arts Council commissioned an independent
consultative report from Adrian Trickey as to the suitability and possibility of the Sherman becoming a young people’s theatre.

With some reservations, the Trickey Report recommended a future for the company and the building as a Centre for Excellence for Young People’s Theatre in the capital city. The Board of Trustees, the Arts Council and the South Glamorgan County Council accepted the recommendations and the new Sherman Theatre policy was launched in 1990.

The Trickey Report (see portfolio box one) predominately recommended:

2. Continuing to provide plays for younger children.
3. Production of plays by the Sherman Theatre should not be the only nor necessarily the main means of implementing a programme for young people.
4. Community and education liaison projects, youth theatre work and collaborative projects with other companies should be developed.
5. The theatre’s pricing policy should be reviewed in the light of its target audience.
6. Collaborations should be sought with the Welsh College of Music and Drama.
7. Incorporation of new writing into the programme should be investigated.
8. An improvement plan for the theatre building should be drawn up and costed.

With these priorities in mind, I in partnership with the Board of Directors, the Senior Management Team and the staff set about structuring positive and achievable change for the Sherman.
Developing a Philosophy through Experience and Practice

In order to set the artistic and executive objectives for the next ten years I wanted to reassess my own philosophy of theatre practice that had brought me to this point in my career and therefore what it was about me as an artist that had inspired the interview panel to appoint me ahead of the other candidates.

Clare Venables, Artistic Director (AD) and Chief Executive (CE) of the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield (until 1991) had warned me that my new position of AD/CE, similar in status to her own, was at times an extremely lonely one. Parts of the job are about collaboration and working in a team, whilst others are about leading from the front, and that’s the lonely part. You are number one and the staff will look to you for leadership. Your confidence will be challenged, questioned and, where appropriate, celebrated. She gave me sound advice not to isolate myself from other AD/CE’s throughout Britain with whom I could share the difficult moments and celebrate each other’s achievements.

I had never been number one before. I had worked in a co-operative and in a management structure. I was however used to leading from the front. It is what a director of a production does all the time in the rehearsal process.

As a director of a show, at various times throughout the process of creating a production you have to be an artist, a leader, a visionary, a teacher, a headmaster, a parent, a decision maker, a friend, a confidante, a traffic warden, an organiser, a team player and an individual. Yes, a ‘Jack of all trades.’ It is exciting, invigorating, challenging but often very isolating. This process existed in the rehearsal room, my challenge was to translate this working practice into a management style and lead a complete organisation.
It was important to invest in the staff of the theatre by sharing objectives and take advice on issues that I had little knowledge of alongside the areas with which I felt confident. I soon realised that this was not the start of a process but the continuation of a philosophy that I had pursued professionally for 15 years and had actually led me to this new appointment.

In *A Good Night Out*, the radical socialist theatre director, John McGrath who had invented and led ground breaking Scottish (Alternative) Theatre Company, 7:84 (seven percent of the population own eighty four percent of the wealth) had commented,

I do not accept the following assumptions,

1. that art is universal, capable of meaning the same to all people

2. that the more 'universal' it is, the better it is

3. that the ‘audience’ for theatre is an idealised white middle-class etc person and that all theatre should be dominated by the tastes and values of such a person

4. that, therefore, an audience without such an idealised person's values is an inferior audience and

5. that the so-called ‘traditional values’ of English literature are now anything other than an indirect cultural expression of the dominance over the whole of Britain of the ruling class of the South East of England.

(McGrath, 1981, p3)

I found myself in agreement with these philosophies and observations. I had spent most of my working life working in Theatre-in-Education, Young People’s Theatre, Youth Theatre and Community Theatre. The majority of my audiences had either been from the working classes or were young people, all deserving of an equal opportunity in life regardless of the class system into which they had been born without personal choice.
McGrath was predominantly commenting on the established theatres throughout Britain, the regional repertory theatres and the larger receiving theatres. He observed that the predominant audience was a white middle class one. This perhaps changed at Christmas with such traditions as pantomime. He believed and argued that just because the militant and working class audiences of Britain didn’t attend these institutions (often for financial restraints) didn’t mean that they were not interested in, or potential audiences for theatre. He demonstrated that by taking theatre to them, in their communities. Through his work with 7:84 Theatre Company, working class audiences became engaged in theatre. It was important that the content of his theatre had a direct relevance to their lives, and again that they felt engaged and welcomed. By performing in non theatre venues such as community centres, retirement homes, village halls, schools and youth centres, McGrath ensured that he engaged his audiences within their own communities. The content of such shows as *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1973), a musical history of the Scottish Highlands, ensured that 7:84’s audience were engaged in the content of the show and that the issues had direct relevance to the lives of the audience.

In her book, Communication Breakdowns (2004), Ruth Shade explores the role of theatre in the south Wales Valleys in the twentieth century. She observes that the involvement of the community within the cultural activity was vital to the worth of that activity. She expounds a theory of ‘familiar congregation’:

> Audiences which are connected by geography, class, history, shared experiences, cultural practices, traditions or other significant elements. This principle also extends to mixed audiences where the familiarity relates to their actually ‘knowing’ each other, or recognizing faces, or, even, acknowledging ‘kinship’ through subtle signs to do with class and self-presentation. Hence, audiences are able to discern a connection between themselves. This is different from audiences who are connected only by the fact of their attending a theatre production on the same night and in the same place.

(Shade, 2004, p180)
In creating a new policy for the Sherman, I too wanted to create a ‘familiar congregation’ and ensure that the content of the work had a relevance to the lives of the audience. My mission was to bring people to the theatre who had not been before because they felt it had no relevance to them. Over the ten years I tackled this objective in numerous ways, for different audiences, be they children under five years old, or older teenagers more interested in popular music. I will talk more about this later in the paper.

Over the years, any piece of theatre I had created had always been invented in partnership with its audience. A one-person-show is not about one person. It’s about that one person’s relationship with the performed material and the audience. In a (2004) Guardian newspaper review, arts correspondent Lyn Gardiner when reviewing a piece of young people’s theatre at Birmingham Rep commented,

> there is no question that this mostly young audience were totally engaged and excited by what they were seeing and their raucous response was totally in gear with this raucous show. It is a sharp reminder that the audience is as crucial as the actors, and that art does not exist in a vacuum, but needs context and community to make it meaningful.

(Guardian newspaper, 2004)

It was with such thoughts, ideas, observations and obsessions that I began to invent and run a regional theatre for young people. I continued to be concerned and fascinated by the needs of the potential audience. Did they visit theatre buildings? Could they afford to visit theatres? Did they want to? Did theatres welcome such audiences? Did the artistic content of the theatre have any relevance to their lives?

All these questions were to obsess me as I constructed artistic seasons and created a theatre environment that aimed to be inclusive of all people, regardless of class, race, sex, gender, sexuality, ability or religion.
A priority for the audience is to identify a point of access to the content of the drama. It became important to take our work out on tour into the community ensuring that our audience and our potential audience had as many points of access to the product as we could possibly (financially) create. They should have the choice of seeing it either in their own community or at the Sherman. The objective was always to ensure that they were always welcome, regardless of the venue and that the ‘on stage’ drama was of relevance to their lives, therefore ensuring a strong bond of engagement between the company and the audience through the drama’s form and content.

I wanted the qualities and objectives of community theatre to be placed centre stage at the Sherman and to be owned by the artists and audience.

This obsession with accessibility was bred in me by visits to the theatre throughout my life. I have never enjoyed being in a theatre experience where I am made to feel inadvertently intellectually inferior and consequently excluded. It happens regularly, I want to be part of the action. I want to be included. I want to be at the centre of the experience. For me, that is the main objective and purpose of the act of theatre, for the writers, directors, actors, designers, and marketing practitioners. If the product and the organisation is publicly subsidised it had to be publicly accountable, accessible and inclusive, regardless of your ability, class, social status and financial situation.

I believe that consistency and regularity of product are key concepts when working with a community. An audience wants to build a positive and inclusive relationship with its cultural provider. These concepts are extremely important when working with young people if a genuine and trustworthy relationship is to be developed. It takes years to build any depth of meaning and trust. What would be set up in 1990 would only be truly assessable in ten years’ time.
Ruth Shade comments,

so much theatre offers pre-prepared product which audiences (merely) consume, they go to the theatre to see actors, as seen on TV or film, or because the play has received media coverage; or because the company has been acclaimed. Theatre is bought in the same way as goods in a supermarket; it is an artefact which is purchased and consumed.

(Shade, 2004, p1)

If this is the case, then a theatre that is building a regular contract with its community through the relevance of the form and content of its work will challenge what Shade goes on to say,

hence the audience has nothing to do with the process of theatre; it does not shape it or influence it, which detaches the audience from the source of the production.

(Shade, 2004, p1.)

Community theatre at its strongest enables its audience through recognition and empathy to identify with the source and relevance of the content of the production. It ensures that its audience is at the centre of the experience, guaranteeing a shared experience and ‘familiar congregation.’ It is this familiarity, she explains that “refers to the relationship between audience and performer” during the event. This can certainly be experienced when in the audience of the Rhondda playwright, Frank Vickery, when, throughout the event, the audience will loudly comment on the actions and narrative on stage often through recognition; therefore a ‘familiar congregation’.

I remember sitting in the audience at the Sherman in 1991 for the opening performance of A Kiss on the Bottom the first play that I commissioned from Frank Vickery. The auditorium was packed and there was a real sense of excitement and anticipation towards the new play from the established Valleys' playwright. A Kiss on the Bottom was an all female play set in a women’s cancer ward of a Valleys hospital. The main character, Marlene, a middle aged matriarch, is about to undergo major surgery, she is lying in bed, talking to another patient, Lucy, about her husband Roy:
Lucy: I think he's missing you.

Marlene: (suspiciously) Well it all seems bloody funny to me. I mean Roy’s not that type. To miss me, like. Or if he is he’d never show it – not for a minute. He’s never been able to show feelings like that. He does have ‘em. He just can’t express ‘em, that’s all.

Lucy: Which is why he’s coming back here tonight and not going on to the celebrations.

Marlene: Maybe. (She pauses) Do you know something? He’s never once told me he loves me? Not once. Not once in twenty-five years. Oh he’ve been jealous, mind. Stopped me doing the gypsy tango with Jackie Turner from the Non Pol once – so I suppose he shows he cares in that way. It’s just that it would be nice if he actually came out and said it. God, I’d be grateful if he wrote it down. (She pauses) Do you know what he wrote on my anniversary card last year? It was our twenty-fifth. “To Marlene, Happy anniversary – all the best – Roy”. Didn’t even have a bloody kiss on the bottom. Didn’t even have a card till our Louise went out and got him one. (Slight pause) He’s always been the same though – never made a fuss. See all these by here? (She points to all the “get well” cards displayed on the headboard of the bed) Not one of them is from him. It’s not that he’s tight or doesn’t want to send me one. (Mimicking him) “What do you want a card from me for? I’d feel so bloody soft, mun”. (She tries to laugh) I can hear him now.

Lucy: There’s a lot of men like that. I blame it on their mothers.

Marlene: How’s that?

Lucy: It’s the way they’re brought up ....School is to blame, too. We’re taught early on to play roles, aren’t we? Boys have to be tough and play cowboys and Indians and girls, shop and house.

Marlene: Not me, love. I’d rather play cowboys any day. A regular Annie Oakley – that’s me..... You’re right though, I s’pose. Perhaps it does all ‘ark back to school days.

(Vickery 1991, p33)

The audience were falling about laughing. The laughter went on and on.

In front of me sat a middle aged married couple. The wife is falling about laughing and the husband turns to her and says:

Husband: What’s funny about that?
Wife: That’s you that is.
Husband: What do you mean?
Wife: Oh forget it.

These comments weren’t whispered, they were spoken out loud. For me it was a true moment that demonstrated how cleverly Vickery was able to
put real life on stage. A point of recognition for the women. A moment of ‘familiar congregation’. Throughout Vickery’s plays the audience talks to each other and often talks out loud to the characters on stage in the middle of a performance because they are so wrapped up in the content and feel a part of the whole event.

My work whether with children, young people or adults has always strived for this empathy and ownership. It is an aspiration of participation and partnership, not just in school halls and community venues, but for all public spaces for debate, be they theatres, arts centres, museums, art galleries or sports stadiums.

What is imperative to the development of this work is continuity, regularity and familiarity in order to ensure ownership and loyalty. Continuity is an important point of engagement with an audience. Audiences turn up in their thousands to see a Vickery play. They are loyal to him as a writer no matter what he is writing about. I also discovered in the ten years that it was important to capitalise on continuity. When we started creating work for the under fives in 1990 we continued to do so on an annual basis through the ten years. This continuity ensured that we built a positive and permanent relationship with pre-school playgroups, nurseries, infant schools, teachers and parents. They trusted the work and remained loyal to the product. That same continuity was important in our work with young people in the youth theatre groups. They needed to know that we were always going to be there for them. Once we had their loyalty, then and only then would they begin to trust the organisation and create new pieces of theatre that were honest and dangerous. Without trust and continuity you cannot expect an honest reaction.

Regularity walked hand in hand with continuity. Patterns of work started to evolve that were useful marketing strategies. Teachers were heard to say, “Oh we always take our children to the Sherman at Christmas”. We had begun to create returning audiences, allowing us to build a dialogue between the community and the theatre. I began to use the same actors,
writers, designers and technicians regularly. This allowed a familiarity between the artists and ensured a dialogue with our audience, because both artist and audience felt safe to express their honesty about the work we were creating and presenting.

In order to re-assess my own philosophy of theatre practice, I first need to re-assess my own formative education, the 15 years of involvement in professional British theatre and the key moments of personal learning that had informed my current practice and philosophy.
Early Years

- Childhood

- Early Professional Development and Learning

- Key Moments in Personal Learning
Childhood

As a child, I had been introduced and exposed to the concepts and emotions of failure very early on in my life. At the age of ten, in the top class at primary school, I vividly remember my class teacher telling me at the beginning of my last academic year at primary level that she couldn’t see the point in her wasting her time teaching me over the next twelve months as there was no way I was going to pass the Eleven Plus exam. Well, that did great things for my self-confidence and sure enough I failed to get into grammar school.

Early Learning

I remember a piano teacher I had at the age of twelve telling my parents, as she gave up teaching me after ten months, “The trouble with Philip is that he’ll be a Jack of all trades and a master of none”. Such damning words from an educationalist (she has subsequently received the OBE for her work in Education). I can vividly remember, as I heard these disturbing words telling myself ‘I’m never going to be like her.’ I sort of knew then at that tender age, and naively that an artist (Jack) must embrace all the trades and strive and struggle with them to interpret and reinvent the world. To be a master was a concept that baffled me. It was and continues to be too definite, too complete and ultimately too unachievable – thankfully.

My secondary education at the Brecon Secondary Modern Technical School in mid Wales was predominately amongst working class children. A majority of my class mates were either from council estates or were farmers’ children, waiting to leave school at the earliest opportunity, regardless of qualifications.
But what I experienced was an education at secondary level that was hands-on, child centred learning. We were taught English by performing plays, reciting poems and writing the school magazine. Science was experienced by walking in the woods and discovering nature. Drama, art, woodwork, metalwork, craft and technical drawing were all about doing, making and creating. We, 'the person,' were at the centre of our own education and encouraged to develop out creativity across the academic curriculum. Brecon Secondary Modern was indeed a rehearsal room for life. Consequently I had predominately an oral education that encouraged me to debate, deliberate, discuss, confront and form opinions in a lively, exciting and non-traditional academic culture. All these skills would be of direct use to me in the professional theatre rehearsal room throughout my life.

There was an equality in this way of learning. An empowerment of the child, a sense of sharing, an importance placed on team building, a joint ownership of success. Failure was much easier to cope with when it was shared. I was unknowingly being introduced to the concepts of socialism.

Little did I realise in those early years that I was becoming exposed to the politics of education and the class system in Britain.

From an early age I had become determined to train as an actor at a London drama school. (I sent off for the prospectus when I was 12.) My parents were extremely supportive but insisted that it would be useful to train as a teacher at the same time, 'something to fall back on' when I was out of work. In 1970/71 I started training as an actor and teacher of speech and drama at the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama, in Sidcup, Kent (twenty minutes outside London).

I had three glorious years. My dream had come true. Theatre all day everyday. What more could I ask for? Like my secondary modern school, Rose Bruford was all practical work. There were no final exams, just continuous assessment. We were all encouraged to work as a team,
an ensemble which was so exciting. We studied all the relevant history of theatre from the Greek and the Roman to modern day. We did this through practical theatre presentations. We transformed our theory into practice at every possible moment. We experienced what it was like to be inside a Greek tragedy, a Shakespearean comedy, a Chekovian drama and a Restoration farce. Because we had experienced the text as a piece of living theatre we were empowered to discuss the construction of the play, the use of language, its relevance to its audience and its theatrical motor from a practitioner’s point of view. We were at the centre of the experience, just like child centred learning, we the artists were central to the learning experience.

Because I had trained as a teacher and an actor, in my final year at Bruford’s, a number of us final students opted not to perform in a big showcase in London, but to devise a Theatre-in-Education programme about pollution that we toured to junior schools throughout London. This was such an exciting experience for me. My passion for theatre was married with my passion for learning and teaching. I was excited by the experience so much that I decided to specialise in Theatre-in-Education and Community Theatre when I left college and entered the profession.
Early Professional Development and Learning

After training as an actor/teacher at the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama in the early 1970s in south London, I became a professional theatre worker in a co-operative company in Newcastle-upon-Tyne called Bruvvers through the 1970s and 80s.

I was an active member of the radical theatre movement in England which had encompassed Theatre-in-Education, Community Theatre and Alternative Theatre Companies.

As a professional actor within this movement, I was a member of the Standing Conference of Young People’s Theatre (SCYPT) and The Association of Community Theatres (TACT). This meant that theatre companies from all over Britain met regularly to discuss each others work and objectives, and we organised annual conferences which profiled various contemporary themes. We also campaigned at a political level for the recognition of the work in the revenue funding structures of the Arts Councils and Local Authorities. The survival of our work was imperative. In 'Dreams and Deconstructions' Naseem Khan comments:

> The survival and growth of community theatre no longer depends on the (increasing) skills of its practitioners but on the ability and willingness of funding bodies both to recognize the different skills required and to continue supporting developments in this area. Were this not to take place the result could be the destruction of an area of art that, at its very best, is a potent and regenerative social force.

(Craig/Khan, 1980, p68)

Issues such as class, feminism, the role of women, sexual politics, sexuality, gender, anti-racism, and multiculturalism had all been extremely important themes in all my professional work. Alongside these themes we placed the concepts of status, equality and the role and purpose of theatre to ensure the empowerment of working class audiences, high on our agenda.
These were heady idealistic and extremely exciting days. There was a shared energy of idealism in England with fellow workers in the Theatre-in-Education and Community Theatre Companies throughout Britain alongside the radical, fringe, alternative theatre movement encompassing such national touring theatre companies as The Belt and Braces Roadshow, The Monstrous Regiment, Red Ladder Theatre, The General Will, FOCO NOVO, Gay Sweatshop, The Women’s Theatre Company and many more. These companies were addressing the same issues and ideology in their work practice in community centres, working men’s clubs, and non-theatre venues throughout Britain, as the TIE Companies were addressing in schools and the Community Theatre Companies in their local communities.

Although I’d spent most of my professional life 1970 – 1980 working in TIE and community theatre, I was not, and am not romantic about the concept of community, particularly working class communities.

I lived and worked for six years in the 1970s/80s in Byker, on the River Tyne, one of the biggest working class community housing redevelopments in Europe and a district of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I lived as part of this community through the last days of the shipyards on the River Tyne. I had watched, experienced, lived and was politically active in a working class community that was being devastated by the Thatcher government policy of closure for the shipyards and coalfields of Britain.

From 1984 – 1990 I lived and worked in Sheffield as the Attercliff Valley, the international home of steel was being wiped out and all this in the shadow of the miners strike of 1984. I experienced working class communities devastated, nationally, alongside mass unemployment and economic devastation as the rich got richer and the poor, poorer. Inevitably alongside this devastation of the working people the cultural heart was being ripped out of the working class communities.
At their height the working class communities of steel, ship-building, coal mining etc celebrated their communities with active participation in cultural events and establishments. The mining communities of South Wales subsidised public libraries, cultural events and the building of hundreds of miners' welfare halls. Alongside these major developments within their communities they sang in choirs, played in brass bands, their children performed in marching bands, and miners Eisteddfods were established throughout South Wales. Throughout the working class communities of Britain, local community centres and welfare halls, built by the working classes were the home to amateur theatre, variety concerts, political debating groups, reading groups, and cinema. Culture was central to a working class community. But by the 1990s much of this had changed. Miners welfare halls were becoming derelict and the working class communities could not afford, due to unemployment and low wage levels, to support the cultural activities in the way they had done during full employment.

Most TIE companies had permanent acting company members, indeed many of the companies worked as co-operatives. Companies such as Leeds TIE Co, Pit Prop Theatre, Greenwich Young People's Theatre (GYPT), Theatre Centre and Crucible Theatre-in-Education Co all had permanent multiracial performers. Actors were not brought in for specific shows, they were core team members. This policy decision by the companies allowed such companies as Leeds TIE to produce multicultural programmes such as Dirty Rascals (1981) a TIE programme for infant schools, performed by a multicultural company and concerned the issues of bullying and power in society. RAJ (1983) was a multicultural programme for young people that explored British Imperialism in India and was devised by the company as a direct response to the Brixton race riots of 1983. The third production Leeds TIE devised was Flags and Bandages (1984) an exploration of the Crimean War and devised as a response to the Falklands War of 1984. The company was always aware of the events in contemporary Britain and devised, within a multi-racial company a theatrical response to these
events that allowed the young audiences to debate contemporary issues in an historical context.

Theatre Centre based in London, towards the end of the 1970s, split their company into two. Both companies were multi-racial was an all women company. The Theatre Centre all women’s company produced such important work as ‘Under Exposure’ by Lisa Evans (1983) about apartheid in South Africa. Crucible TIE had an anti-racist policy that they sent to all their schools that ensured that the teachers understood and helped celebrate the multiculturalism of the work. This work was important. I remember going into a Derbyshire school in 1984 to watch Theatre Centre performing one of their plays. I arrived early morning and I overheard the school cleaners say, ‘We’ve got the Black and White Minstrels in today’. This experience, emphasised to me the importance of the work, and the policy decisions that those TIE companies had made. This was ground breaking work that confronted its audience on so many levels, and thanks to the TIE movement it was happening all over England throughout the 1970s and 80s.

It is not my intention to write a history of the radical theatre movement in Britain in the 1970s and 80s but knowledge of this important movement is necessary to understand and contextualise the decisions I made in creating the new policy for the Sherman Theatre in the 1990s.

**Tracing the Roots**

I started my career in the late 60s with the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain (NYT). In 1966, 67 and 68 playwright Peter Terson was working with the NYT writing such plays as *Zigger Zagger* about football hooliganism, unemployment and job opportunities, *Fuzz* about student unrest and revolt and *Springheeled Jack* concerning victimisation of ordinary people by so called hooligans and thugs on council house estates. The Youth Theatre movement, the TIE companies, the community theatres and alternative theatre companies were constantly
exposing and exploring such social themes throughout the 70s/80s and, those remaining, continue to do so to this day.

My early professional work in the 1970s involved working with the professional Theatre-in-Education movement. All the community and TIE companies had strong anti-racist and equal opportunity policies and were often viewed by the mainstream theatre and repertory companies as far too radical and extreme. Anti-racist and equal opportunity statements were integral to the mission statements of the companies. Political debate in terms of the environment, sexism, the British arms trade, imperialism, racism, bullying, fascism and state control were central to the ethos of the content of shows and the collective methods used to create them.

This movement of radical theatre was then known as the ‘alternative theatre movement’. Alternative that is to the mainstream of London theatres and regional repertory theatres and as Sandy Craig commented in the book, Dreams and Deconstructions.

Alternative theatre is a house of many voices, most of them dissenting.

(Craig, 1980, p7)

Predominantly the work of the TIE and community theatre companies happened in non-theatre venues, to, in the main, non theatre going audiences. Most of their work was marginalised and often dismissed by the main theatre movement. Interestingly in their book Changing Stages – A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century, Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, Bloomsbury 2000 never so much as mentions Theatre-in-Education, Community Theatre or the alternative theatre movement of the 1970s/80s. Some regional theatres helped partner the TIE movement, but the issues that were expressed by the movement of alternative theatre were seen as far too radical for the mainstream theatre.
Ironically, by the mid 1980s the Thatcher Government had begun to re-assess its funding commitment to the TIE and alternative theatre movement. In *Dreams and Deconstructions*. Sandy Craig goes on to comment:

> As I write there are a number of hopeful trends and new departures; feminist and gay theatre are beginning to achieve a continuity of tradition; that political theatre has made a lasting impression, and that the shift to various forms of satiric cabaret is more than a passing fad.  

(Craig, 1980, p186)

By the late 1980s many of the companies in all sectors of alternative/political theatre had lost their state funding.

Many of the young voices of the TIE, YPT and CT sector of the 1970s and 80s are now in positions of power within the British theatre. When they were young and part of the TIE, YPT and CT movement, they were regarded as alternative. Now, they still hold on to their radical ideas but are in powerful positions to influence change within the establishment. Jude Kelly, now artistic director of the South Bank Arts Complex in London, and prior to this was one of the few women to run a theatre as artistic director and chief executive of the Welsh Yorkshire Playhouse in the 90s. Jude started her career as a performer with the Phoenix Theatre, Leicester YPT company touring schools and as director of the Solent Theatre Company, a TIE and CT company in the south of England. Gwenda Hughes was director of Theatre Powys and Watford Palace TIE company commissioning such writers as Lisa Evans. Gwenda, having been associate director of the Birmingham Rep, one of Britain’s biggest rep theatres, went on to be artistic director and chief executive of the New Vic Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent. The black actor, Willie Laynan was an actor with Leeds TIE for many years and progressed to be principal of the Arden Theatre School in Manchester working with the next generation of British theatre talent. The writer Lisa Evans who wrote such ground breaking plays as *Under Exposure* (Theatre Centre, 1983/4) and *Stamping, Shouting and Singing Home* (1984) a play about black
women in the deep south of America, for Watford Palace Theatre TIE Co now writes for *Eastenders* on TV and theatre companies such as Birmingham Rep. The Asian director, Kully Thiarai, was director of Red Ladder Community Theatre and went on to invent and direct the Asian Theatre School Company and is currently artistic director of the Leicester Haymarket Theatre.

Today 30 years on, all theatres have to have an equal opportunities statement/policy. Only now in the 21st century are we beginning to see integrated casting at the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and other mainstream repertory theatres. Only now are we hearing the voices of black and Asian writers in our large theatres.

Alongside my involvement in this movement of change within the British theatres, my everyday practice of making theatre remained paramount to me as a creative artist. The experience of creating theatre and forging a dialogue with an audience was the life blood of my existence. It was vital to me that the work I created was relevant to a contemporary society.

All of these practitioners were at the heart of the so-called radical and alternative theatre movement of the 70s and 80s. They were a generation arising. Now they are in positions of influence and power within the British theatre movement and ensure that black and Asian, gay, lesbian, disabled and women theatre practitioners voices are heard not just in schools, village halls, community centres and non theatre venues, but on the large stages of our main theatres and media companies with status.

In the twenty-first century we are seeing funding being made available by the Arts Councils (the Decibel Scheme) and the media companies such as Channel 4 to positively encourage the voices that were in the main marginalised in the 70s and 80s.
The voices of the TIE, YPT, CT and YT movement of the 1970s and 80s were important voices. They often spoke for the disempowered within society. They shouted out loud that they wanted to be empowered and that they had important things to say alongside the 'white middle class' community that McGrath identified as being the dominant voice in British theatre. These, then young voices, were empowered and nurtured by the alternative theatre movement and have continued to influence British theatre into the twenty-first century.
Key Moments in Personal Learning

There are two professional episodes/events in my life that continue to disturb and inform my thinking. The first happened in the late 1970s. I was working as an actor/teacher with Bruvvers Theatre Company in the North East of England. A group of us had set the company up in 1976 and we specialised in participatory Theatre-in-Education projects with children in special schools. It is important to note that at this time special education schools for children and young people (under 14 years) were in two categories 1) educationally subnormal (mild) ESN(M) and 2) educationally subnormal (severe) ESN(S).

We were working in an ESN(S) school with a group of 15 children, their teachers and carers. We had devised a full day participation programme for the children that explored the theme of ‘fear’ and the physical generalising of motor skills. The theme of ‘fear’ had been identified with the teachers some months before. Fear for these children often manifested itself in a physical clamping up of motor skills in public places, ie physically freezing on the escalator in a department store. This fear often came about because of the unknown, ie not knowing what was at the top of the escalator. This form of freezing was a regular occurrence and manifestation of fear in these children and it was interesting that the teachers truly believed that a piece of theatre would help the children make the connection and understanding between the physical, emotional and intellectual concept of fear through drama. Thus an understanding would empower the child and hopefully lead to conquering the fear.

We had devised a programmed called ‘BOO’. A strange creature called Boo arrives in their classroom, it cannot speak, only nod and shake its head and say boo. Through questions and answers the children discover that the creature comes from the planet ‘Phobia’ and wants the children to take it back to Phobia. To cut a long scenario short, the young participants agree and we begin to organise ourselves.
I have a group of four young people who will be travelling with me as a team. We will be in charge of routes and maps. In order to function as a team, I give my four fellow workers/travellers blank paper badges and ask them to write their names on their badge. You have to remember that the actual age of these children is between 9-11 years but their mental ages vary between 3 – 6 years.

One of the members of my group is called John and when I gave him the blank badge and pen, his teacher standing behind him indicates to me that he cannot write (John does not see this). I acknowledge her concern and reassure all the participants that whatever they put on their badge means their name, therefore there is no sense of failure. John however takes the pen and writes his name perfectly on the badge. The teacher is astounded. I am amazed. Both of us want to celebrate but neither of us want to make John feel awkward in the group. The teacher is desperate to know how I got John to write his name, I assure her that we will talk about it at lunchtime.

At lunchtime, during a break in the TIE programme, the teacher is bursting with excitement. All she can say is ‘How did you do it?’ Luckily I had had time to analyse the situation. The teacher explained that she had tried for two years to get John to write his name, but she had never been successful. I explained that she had been successful in teaching John how to write his name, what she had been unable to teach him was why he needed to write his name. As a participant inside the TIE programme John was emotionally engaged in the dilemma of returning Boo to the planet Phobia. In order to do that he had to wear his name badge, therefore he needed to write his name. Without thinking of the task, but focusing on the purpose John wrote his name.

The second episode that indeed changed, disturbed and informed by life happened in 1983. After ten years of working in Theatre-in-Education I decided to spend some time as a classroom teacher and was appointed a drama/media studies teacher in a newly formed (the first in the
authority) Performing Arts Department of Benfield Secondary School, Byker in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Now I had been working within the Education Authority for nearly eight years taking TIE into the schools throughout the authority. Some seven or eight years previous to this time, again with Bruvvers Theatre Company, we had devised a participatory TIE programme for the top junior children (10-11 years) on the events surrounding and causing the Peasants Revolt, or rather the People's Uprising of 1381. Within the programme we looked at the structures of society and the children were divided into groups and had to make certain objects ie grow corn, make horse shoes etc, and then give a part of what they made back to the lord of the manor as a tax for being on and using his land. I had played the Reeve who collected taxes.

Anyway back at Benfield School (seven/eight years on) on my second day of teaching I walked into my first lesson with my lower 6th form drama group. I was about to introduced them to the work of Bertolt Brecht when a voice said, “Oh my God, not you!”

I looked at the 16 year old woman who had exclaimed and I didn’t know her from Adam – but she knew me. Without an invitation she hastily explained that she had taken part in the TIE programme when she was ten years old and as a labourer (in role) she was unable to pay her taxes because she hadn’t made enough horses’ shoes, and I had informed her that the lack of tax could result in both her hands being cut off. Lizzie, the young participant and now A level drama student, was able to tell all of her class about the work of Watt Tyler, who led the uprising; how the plague had been caused by fleas from Europe on the backs of rats into Britain and had devastated the country with the Black Death, and how the King of England had tricked the people of the uprising with giving up their fight by lying. All these facts and figures were so sharp in Lizzie’s mind as if she had been in the TIE programme yesterday. But yet again, I realised that Lizzie had remembered all the facts because she was
emotionally involved with the context of the piece of theatre, and yet again she had a purpose for learning.

Incidents such as these have happened regularly for me in the last 30 years and I am pleased to say that they continue to do so, often on a daily basis. These incidents disturb my life positively. They become my driving force.

It has been these two incidents in my early professional career that have been 'markers' for me and given me a purpose in my professional development. They assured me that theatre can disturb people's lives. Because I had been myself at the centre of these two learning experiences with the young people I genuinely experienced the power of Young People's Theatre (YPT). That's why I am committed to YPT; that's why I continue to investigate how a child learns. That's why I know theatre has an important, positive and disturbing role to play within society. That's why it is worth empowering the child. That's why we should rock the boat. That's why children should be seen and heard and have a rightful/fitful role to contribute to democratic society.

It was with all this experience, knowledge and passion that I arrived at the Sherman in 1990 to create Wales' only Theatre for Young People. I had been a part of an arising generation that had challenged the mainstream theatre movement in Britain. I now had the opportunity to invest in the next generation arousing and empowering them to create a cultural change.
Wales

- Where did Wales sit in the Cultural Map of Britain?

- The Welsh Theatre Scene
Where did Wales sit in the Cultural Map of Britain?

Having been appointed to the new position of Artistic Director/Chief Executive I needed to gain a greater knowledge of the cultural objectives of Wales and the city of Cardiff.

In my 15 years absence, Wales had changed radically. The Welsh Language Act had been introduced, and the Welsh language television channel, S4C had been invented. These were two radical changes to the cultural agenda of Wales. The Wales of 1990 had the Welsh language at the centre of its cultural debate. I knew very little of this debate primarily because I had spent all my professional career working in England and although I had been very politically active I was virtually unaware of the politics of Wales.

So, why didn’t I know anything about Wales and its culture except the obvious trademarks of Shirley Bassey, Tom Jones, Eisteddfods and rugby?

I began to reflect upon geographical regions of Britain to see how I perceived them culturally. I thought about cities such as Edinburgh, with its mighty arts festivals, its International Festival of Theatre for Young People, the Lyceum Theatre (producing), the world renowned Traverse Theatre dedicated to new writing and its endless smaller arts venues. Birmingham, Britain’s second city and home to ballet, and classical music alongside the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and pioneering development for new writing in its studio (The Door) with a thriving multicultural and ethnic arts scene emanating from such venues as the MAC Centre. Manchester, with three producing theatres, Contact Theatre dedicated to young audiences, The Library Theatre and the Royal Exchange Theatre, plus numerous receiving houses and of course, its fast growing gay community. Leeds, with various receiving houses, the then newly established and thriving West Yorkshire Playhouse,
possibly the premier producing house of the North and the city's growing reputation for young culture as Britain's 24 hour city.

Apart from these cities there were two regions of Britain that offered me the clearest opportunity for cultural analysis, Merseyside (Liverpool) and Tyneside (Newcastle-upon-Tyne).

With major cities at their hearts, these two regions, although part of an infrastructure of England, also bred and fostered (and continue to do so) a sort of culture that was/is unique to its region.

Liverpool had created the biggest change in the populist culture of Britain in the 1960s with the emergence of The Beatles. Merseyside had an energy. Alongside its musicians were the legendary Liverpool poets, Brian Patten, Roger McGough and Adrian Henry. The city had two producing theatres of national reputation, the Liverpool Playhouse and the ground breaking Everyman Theatre, both committed to new writing and home to such literary giants as Willy Russell and Alan Bleasdale. Liverpool was also home to Merseyside Young People's Theatre Company which toured to schools and who originally commissioned Willy Russell to write *Blood Brothers* as a schools touring show. The media and television companies had developed positive working relationships with the live arts and what emerged were TV dramas and sit-coms like *Boys From the Blackstuff* (Bleasdale) and *The Liver Birds* (Carla Lane) alongside its groundbreaking TV soap opera *Brookside*. The Merseyside writers and actors could be seen on stage and on screen. Many of its new plays transferred to London's West End theatres after national tours, including *Educating Rita, John, Paul, George, Ringo and Bert, Blood Brothers, Shirley Valentine* (all Willy Russell), *Having a Ball* (Bleasdale), and *Lennon* (Bob Eaton). Merseyside was 'trendy,' it was 'on the 'telly,' in the record shops, on the radio, in the clubs, on the screens, on the stage and consequently in the lives of British people. It had achieved this status because of partnerships between the writers, actors, TV companies, radio stations, clubs, theatres and film companies. But what
was important above all the partnerships was the high quality of the artist’s work.

Tyneside in the North-East of England, or Geordie Land as it was more commonly known also had a collaborative culture. It had been the home of the pop band, The Animals, musician Alan Price, and the legendary Lindisfarne rock band. The city had a large receiving theatre, the Theatre Royal, a second receiving house, the Tyne Theatre, a large 500 seater amateur theatre venue, the People’s Theatre and a major producing theatre, the University Theatre, home to the Tyne Wear Theatre Company (now the Newcastle Playhouse) that performed on its main stage, in its studio and on tour to community venues. The company had its own Theatre-in-Education company that performed free of charge to Tyne and Wear schools. Tyne and Wear had numerous community and Theatre-in-Education companies including Bruvvers, Major Diversions, Uncle Ernie’s Roadshow, Skin and Bones, Wearside and the most prolific, Live Theatre Company. Writers such as C P Taylor and Tom Hadaway were working with a number of the companies. The rock bands too were working with the theatre companies (Sting’s first professional theatre job was with the Tyne Wear Theatre Company). Like Merseyside, Tyneside was a community that celebrated its artists who worked across the performance genres. Again the television companies recognised this artistic energy and invested in the arts and what emerged were such classic series as When the Boat Comes In (BBC Drama series), Byker Grove (Tyne Tees Television soap opera), and Auf Wiedersehen Pet, all profiling Geordie artists who had put the North-East on the British and international cultural agenda through partnerships across the industry. What was exciting for me was that I had been a part of this energy as an actor working with Tyne and Wear Theatre Company, Bruvvers, Tyne Tees Television as a presenter and also worked with writers such as C P Taylor and Lee Hall and worked on a series of When the Boat Comes In.
The artists of Merseyside and Tyneside worked across the performance medias but they had a real commitment to their own communities they wrote about, sang about, acted about, where they came from, and in the main celebrated their working class politics and socialism.

The other clear observation for me was the role the media had played in promoting this regional British culture at national and international levels, ensuring that it was the Merseysideness and Geordiness that was central to the celebration of talent.

So having existed and participated in such regional cultural activity I was interested in discovering the Welshness of Wales and more particularly the theatre activity in Cardiff. What was certain was that I was not aware, when living in England for some 15 years, of the theatre work of Wales. I was of Liverpool, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, or indeed, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham or Bristol.

So what did I discover in Cardiff in 1990? Alongside the Sherman Theatre's work was the New Theatre, a receiving house for national touring theatre from England and the performance home of the Welsh National Opera, Chapter Arts Centre, an experimental contemporary arts facility in the west of the city, presenting small-scale theatre. There were theatre companies including Made In Wales, Hijinx, Moving Being, Brith Gof and Theatr Iolo, alongside project companies such as Man Act, The Magdalena Project and Y Cwmni. Predominantly the work that I discovered was exciting experimental theatre that was more often influenced by the European theatre movement of the 70s and 80s. There was a thriving theatre school at the Welsh College of Music and Drama. But for a capital city there was no major producing theatre company working on stages to compare with such companies working in the major cities of England.

There is often a feeling in the regions of Britain that it is 'our turn' to be spotlighted and raised higher into the cultural consciousness of the
nation. This is done primarily through the media to create populist television. It certainly happened to Tyneside and Merseyside. You could also see it happen to Manchester (Coronation Street), Yorkshire (Emmerdale), Birmingham (Crossroads), and Bristol (Casualty). There was an optimism in Wales in the 90s that it was 'our turn.' We did see a rise of 'Cool Cymru' which was based on the rock bands, The Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia, The Stereophonics, The Alarm, The Super Furry Animals, and the profiling of young Welsh actors, Michael Sheen, Rhys Ifans, Ioan Gruffuud and Daniel Evans working in England and in international films. At home in Wales important work was created by Welsh writers such as Ed Thomas, Frank Vickery, Ian Rowlands, Owen Sears and visual artists such as Kyffin Williams, Shani Rhys James and Tim Davies. But sadly the national spotlight never shone on Wales. The 1990s was the time for Wales to create, through cross-genre media partnerships and collaborations. A collective Welsh voice could have attracted major international cultural recognition. It could have happened in Wales with a major investment in the artists as had happened in Tyneside and Merseyside.

For such recognition to have been achieved it was vital that the ACW, BBC Wales, HTV Wales, S4C and the newspapers worked in partnership. These organisations had the power and the resources to ensure a high profile that positively promoted the work of Welsh artists. What I observed, was a culture of territories. The media companies were competing against each other for viewing figures. ACW did not act as a co-ordinator between the live and recorded arts and had no dialogue with the press and media schemes of Wales. Had a partnership been created, and national and international objectives been set and strived for by all parties then there was a possibility of recognition for the artists of Wales in an international context. But it never happened.

What I did know was that what lay ahead for the Sherman Theatre was an intense period of struggle, re-invention, danger, ambition, learning and creative vision that could only happen in partnership with the community.
The Welsh Theatre Scene

I knew that my first port of call had to be with the artists. It was important that I pursued dialogues with the artists of the nation. Artists are survivors, regardless of politics they usually emerge with a distinct voice that reflects that of the nation. It could not happen over night. There was a series of dialogues to be established over the next three to five years with the artistic community of Wales. This I decided should be done through artistic collaboration between the Sherman and Wales’ theatre companies and through active participation from me personally becoming involved with a few companies in order to build relationships.

Of course not all artists share your ideology, so partnership is not a given way forward with all makers of theatre. I had to identify those companies with whom I, and they, could share a common artistic ideology and build bridges and partnerships for future productions.

Within the first month of my appointment, I took three days out of my schedule, got in my car, and drove all over Wales and visited as many venues as I could and met their directors. I felt it was important to have face to face meetings with the practitioners and start to develop a dialogue and possible partnerships.

There were two areas to consider when investigating the work of the Welsh theatre artist, one Wales and two, Cardiff. Only after such consideration could I begin to address, prioritise and activate the recommendations of the Trickey Report.
Wales

Professional English language theatre is still in its infancy in comparison to World theatre. There is really only a fifty year history of the movement at a professional level. Many of the mid 1950s English language plays of Wales are short one act plays which were often premiered with amateur theatre groups before being produced professionally, in the theatre, on television or radio. A brief history of the movement can be observed in my book *Act One Wales* published by Seren Books in 1997. (see portfolio box two)

Throughout the second half of the last century, professional English language theatre in Wales had gone through radical change and constant withdrawal of public funding. Companies such as the Welsh Theatre Company, Theatre Wales, Theatr y Mylon, Caricature Theatre and Made In Wales, all revenue funded companies had existed for approximately 10 – 15 year life spans before having their money withdrawn and a new company created to take over the English language theatre remit. Consequently there had been no artistic consistency or development and as a result of this inconsistency there had been no continual audience development. In fact you could observe that the Welsh theatre audience was confused as to what was professional and what was amateur. Most people are product loyal as customers, but only if the product is constant in its existence (availability) and quality.

The only continually funded performance activity in the last 50 years in Wales has been the Welsh National Opera. The company began its life as an amateur organisation but having been professional it has continued to be loyal to its audience through its constancy of existence and quality. Consequently in return, its audience has developed and remained loyal allowing the company to experiment artistically and to expand its audience internationally. There has been no similar theatre organisation development in Wales in the last 50 years.
Throughout the 1990s Wales had a network of four producing professional theatres in the four corners of Wales. Theatr Clwyd based in Mold, in the North-East, Theatr Gwynedd in Bangor, in the North-West, the Torch Theatre in Milford Haven in the South-West and the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff in the South-East. Alongside performing at their base theatres all four companies toured throughout Wales.

During this period Wales also had a network of theatre companies, some revenue funded, others project funded that performed in communities and small theatres. They included Hijinx Theatre Company (Cardiff), Made In Wales Theatre Company (Cardiff), Y Cwmni (Cardiff), Theatr Y Byd (Cardiff), Moving Being (Cardiff), Dalier Sylw (Cardiff), Bara Caws (Caernarfon), Brith Gof (Cardiff/Aberystwyth) and Mappa Mundi (Cardiff). These companies all had very different artistic objectives, for example, Hijinx specialised in theatre for people with learning difficulties within the community; Made In Wales only worked in the English language with new and established writers in Wales; Y Cwmni and Theatr Y Byd were writer led companies where writers (Ed Thomas, Y Cwmni and Ian Rowlands, Theatr Y Byd) were also artistic directors, Dalier Sylw and Theatr Bara Caws worked in new writing in the Welsh language predominantly for small scale theatres and community venues; Brif Gof worked in both languages and created site specific theatre whilst Moving Being and Mappa Mundi were the only companies working in English with established and contemporary texts

In the 1970s the Arts Council in partnership with the local authorities of Wales had established eight Theatre-in-Education companies throughout Wales that delivered theatre work to schools, free of charge, and of direct relevance to the educational curriculum. These companies, Theatr Powys (Powys), Outreach (Clwyd), Cwmni Fran Wen (Gwynedd), Arad Goch (Ceredigion), Theatr West Glamorgan (West Glamorgan), Gwent Theatre (Gwent), Spectacle Theatre (Rhondda Cynon Tafl), and Theatre lolo (South Glamorgan) became the jewel in the crown of the Welsh theatre and such a system of constant financial, cultural, and artistic
partnerships between the state and local authorities became the envy of many other international countries. The system ensured a constant dialogue with its audience and between companies creating a unique artistic voice that was in harmony with its community.

Throughout Wales there continues to be a network of arts centres and presenting theatres that programme the work of Welsh theatre companies alongside international work. These can be found in such locations as Swansea, Rhyl, Llandudno, Harlech, Brecon, Builth Wells, Newtown, Holyhead, Colwyn Bay, Abegavenny, Treorchy, Aberystwyth, Pontypridd, Blackwood, Cwmaman, Aberdare, Pontydulais, Ammanford, Carmarthen, and many others. These venues with the four producing houses make up the touring scheme for Welsh and English language Welsh theatre.

There are also a series of venues throughout Wales compiled of community centres, schools, village halls etc, which make up the 'Night Out' circuit. Subsidised by the Arts Council, these venues are able to receive and present small scale community and young people's theatre product.

Wales has a long history of amateur theatre in both languages and the amateur theatre movement is extremely active throughout Wales. All of this work is co-ordinated professionally by the Drama Association of Wales.

There was also a wide, and highly active network of youth theatres throughout the nation. Many of the groups were attached to professional theatre companies (ie Theatr Powys, the Sherman, Spectacle, Gwent Theatre, etc), theatre venues, amateur theatre companies and community organisations and venues.

There are some national movements for performance, predominately Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Eisteddfod Genedlaethol and the National Youth
Theatre, Choir, Orchestra and Dance Companies. The National Youth movement and network of companies is co-ordinated professionally by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) in partnership, financially and culturally with the Arts Council and the local authorities of Wales.

Cardiff

In Cardiff, the capital city, there were/are a number of cultural centres for the performing arts. The New Theatre, funded by the City Council was/is the main presenting venue for national touring theatre product predominately from England and the performance home to the Welsh National Opera. The Chapter Arts Centre works with artists across the medias and has a small studio theatre. St David’s Hall, funded by the City Council is the national concert hall, Llanover Hall is a small arts centre working across the media and prioritises working with young people inside and outside of the education system. The Cardiff International Arena (CIA) is large commercial and independent arena space for bands, concerts, conferences, exhibitions and events. The Norwegian Church in Cardiff Bay is a small cross-art form arts centre with a small performance space. In the early 90s, St Stephens (converted church) theatre in Cardiff Bay was the home to Moving Being Theatre Company, but by the end of the 90s was sold off to the private sector. There are numerous community centres, tenants' halls, and schools throughout the city which host professional touring theatre (small scale) product. The Sherman was and still is the only producing theatre in the capital city with two performance spaces. A large proscenium theatre seating 480 people (Venue 1) and a studio theatre (Venue 2) seating between 160 – 200 in variable and adaptable seating layouts. No other venue in Cardiff was home to a professional theatre company that produced in-house work.

Alongside these live arts venues, Cardiff was home to the major media companies, BBC Wales (TV and radio), HTV Wales, S4C, and numerous independent TV and radio production companies.
I realised, very early in the 1990s, that the task to create a YPT in Cardiff with a remit to all Wales, was going to be very exciting, but also extremely challenging. Because of the lack of a major producing house in Cardiff there was a danger that the Sherman would be perceived as all things to all people. My aim was to be adamant that the Sherman should be a YPT and my objective was to demonstrate this policy to the artists and audiences of the city and beyond. It therefore became clear that all the work that the Sherman created, produced and presented had a direct relevance to the target audience as identified in the Trickey report.
Recommendations and Objectives

- Responding to the Trickey recommendations
- Developing New Objectives and Targets
Recommendations and Objectives

Responding to the Trickey recommendations became my primary objective. The eight major recommendations were:

1. Programming the Sherman for prime target audiences
2. Continuing to provide plays for younger audiences
3. Production of plays by the Sherman Theatre should not be the only, nor necessarily the main means of implementing a programme for young people.
4. Community and Education liaison projects, youth theatre work and collaborative projects with other companies should be developed.
5. The theatre pricing policy should be reviewed in the light of its target audience.
6. Collaborations should be sought with the Welsh College of Music and Drama.
7. Incorporation of new writing into the programme should be investigated.
8. An improvement plan for the Sherman should be drawn up and costed.

Developing new objectives and targets

Alongside and complimentary to the Trickey objectives I identified a number of new objectives which included:

1. Restructure of the Board of Trustees
2. Develop the internal policy and create codes of practice.
3. Create a dialogue with the artistic community of Wales and raise the profile of the Sherman Theatre nationally and internationally.
Responding to the Trickey Recommendations

The recommendations of the Trickey report set clear objectives. Certain of these objectives could be implemented immediately. Others would form the basis of the long term business plan.

1. Programming the Sherman for prime target audiences 15 – 25 year olds

It is clear from this objective that the aim was to create a young people’s theatre, and not a children’s theatre. A clear example of a children’s theatre is the Polka Theatre for Children in Wimbledon, south London. This theatre prioritises work for children up to 11 – 12 years. The Trickey objective was targeting young people in secondary schools and higher education, alongside young adults who had chosen not to enter further education, it was relatively easy to identify their educational needs as prescribed in the curriculum. Over the ten years it was important to create and produce set drama texts for examinations. The decision was taken to produce one of these a year. Alongside this work we began to identify what the trends were in youth culture and sport and began to create work that responded to this culture, ie Up n’ Under, John Godber’s play about rugby. An evening with Gary Lineker, the popular West End success that looked at young 20 somethings relationship towards themselves in a football culture. Everything Must Go, Patrick Jones’ play about the disappointed youth of the South Wales Valleys’ and Flesh and Blood by Helen Griffith about teenage racism in the valleys with new music by Mike Peters of one of Wales’ greatest rock bands, The Alarm.

Plays for young people who were studying texts for examination and curriculum needs included Kes by Barry Hines, Table Manners by Alan Ayckbourn, Ash on a Young Man’s Sleeve by
Dannie Abse (adapted by Charles Way), *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney, *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas, *All’s Fair* by Frank Vickery, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, and Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar*. With these productions I was concerned that young people from South Wales were engaged in the content and issues of the drama. It was important that they had a theatrical experience, but also that they could relate the issues to their own understanding of the world, along with being able to respond to the text academically for examination purposes. We often created playdays that accompanied these productions. This meant that young people (500) would attend the Sherman for a complete day. In the morning they attended a workshop with the actors, directors and designers that gave them an insight into how and why the production had been created in its particular way. These workshops were interactive and allowed the audience to ask questions of all the artists working on the production. These workshops created a framework for the young people to watch the complete production in the afternoon. Some of these productions, *Ash on a Young Man’s Sleeve*, *Under Milk Wood*, *All’s Fair* were set in Wales and therefore young people had an immediate understanding of the culture of the text. Others I transported to Wales to help young people to find the relevance in the text to their own lives and communities. All our productions were performed by predominately Welsh actors. There seemed to me no reason why *Kes* could not be relocated from the working class communities of Yorkshire to the Rhondda valleys or why Cardiff could not be submitted for Manchester in *A Taste of Honey*. It was extremely important with all this work that it engaged the young audience. This approach to the text applied across the cannon of work from Dylan Thomas to Shakespeare and aimed to ensure a contemporary relevance to its young audiences.
It is the point of relevance that fascinated me. Alongside transposing texts to Wales, it was important to discover other relevant issues within the texts that had direct similarities to the lives of young people living in South Wales. I wanted to expose the universal issues within each of the texts such as single parenting (A Taste of Honey) the special needs of characters Of Mice and Men the struggle of young love Romeo and Juliet were issues that concerned young people living in South Wales. If we could get young people to identify with these issues in their own lives/communities then perhaps theatre could help them understand their roles as citizens of the world.

2. Continuing to provide plays for younger audiences

In order to get teenagers and young adults to come to the theatre, it is really important that they have had a positive experience in theatre in their formative years.

We developed another strong strand of our production work in the studio theatre with the commissioning and production of new work for the very young (under fives). Theatre for the very young hardly existed in the 1980s anywhere in Britain. Theatre-in-Education (TIE) companies took work into schools, but this was predominately for young people above the age of five years. We began to develop new plays for pre-school children performed by professional actors with playwrights such as Mike Kenny, Charles Way and Brendan Murray (all winners of the Arts Council of England Children’s Playwriting Award). Over the ten years we developed a strong audience for this work and perceived the work as a core activity of the Sherman’s artistic policy. Much of the work was toured throughout Wales, with a strong emphasis on the South Wales Valleys. Because of financial restrictions it was not possible to continually tour throughout Wales. We identified that the Valleys of South Wales, the most densely populated region of
Wales, as a priority in our community touring. This allowed us to tour daily from the base of the Sherman and avoid extra financial costs of overnight stays for actors and crews. We also developed co-production partnerships for this work with Theatre Centre, London, the Unicorn Theatre for Young People, London and Polka Children’s Theatre, Wimbledon. This allowed us to take the work further afield throughout Britain on tour. We consistently developed this work in both English and Welsh languages.

Plays for children on big stages are few and far between in the cannon of British theatre. One of the greatest writers for children (not plays), Roald Dahl, was born in Cardiff. It seemed a sensible idea to establish the Sherman as the theatrical home in Wales for the writings of this magnificent ‘son of the city’. This would mean establishing a strong relationship with the Roald Dahl Foundation, Felicity Dahl (his widow) and playwrights who have strong adaptation skills. Over the ten years (and beyond) we produced Matilda, Boy (premiere), The Twits, The BFG, The Enormous Crocodile (premiere), James and the Giant Peach (premiere), and Danny the Champion of the World (premiere). All of them proved to be terrific box office successes. These of course were adaptations for the stage, not new plays, but they demanded a theatrical performance style that engaged its young audience. This was often achieved through direct address to the audience mainly by the central protagonists within the play. We constantly used music to enhance a relationship with the audience, sometimes including participatory songs. Another way we developed this work was to continually re-invent the physical relationship between the audience and the production, sometimes working in the round, or thrust or end stage. Certain productions we created were environmental and invited the audience to sit inside the set that had been built for the production. The phenomenon of Dahl is the ownership of his writings by young people. In a broad sense, throughout his writing the children in the
stories are the heroes and the adults the villains. Consequently telling the stories from a child's point of view became extremely important if the child in the audience was to empathise with the production and embrace the ownership of the objectives. Alongside the work of Dahl we also presented new adaptations of great writers for young people, including Susan Cooper (*The Dark is Rising*), Dick King Smith (*Babe, The Sheep Pig*), Jenny Nimmo (*The Snow Spider*), Dodie Smith (*The One Hundred and One Dalmatians*), Enid Blyton (*The Secret Seven*), Mary Norton (*The Borrowers*) and many more. Over these years we established strong relationships with some of Britain's top writers for young people including David Wood, Brendan Murray, Mike Kenny and Charles Way. Our partnership with these top writers was integral to the success of the work.

By working with a select group of writers we were able to develop a dialogue between the actors and the writers. When we commissioned these writers, they knew that we wanted to ensure that both the form and the content of the work had a relevance to its target audience. Because these writers worked continuously in YPT they brought to our process a wider knowledge and experience that we could capitalise upon and develop within our own work with local actors and audiences.

3. **Production of plays by the Sherman Theatre should not be the only, nor necessarily the main means of implementing a programme for young people.**

Alongside programming work for young audiences from the national touring companies such as The Royal National Theatre, Birmingham Stage Company, Theatre Centre London, The Unicorn Theatre etc etc, we developed an international festival (for three years) of young people's theatre from all over the world, in partnership with Edinburgh Children's Festival. After three years
the funding ran out so we were unable to sustain this activity. Also ACW awarded new monies to Arad Goch Theatre Co in Aberystwyth to develop an international festival of YPT in Ceredigion.

One of our strongest strands of work was the invention and development of the Saturday Young Scene programme. Every Saturday (three eight week seasons a year) we presented theatre for children. Twice daily professional theatre companies who specialised in work for young audiences played to packed auditoriums.

We wanted to create a regular clientele, young adults with their children using the Sherman on a weekly basis as part of their cultural agenda. This work was so successful, it became a core activity of the Sherman's artistic policy ensuring that a target audience – 2 - 30 years olds were sharing a theatrical experience on a weekly basis. Alongside the show, this activity ensured that young adults were welcomed into the theatre, and used all the facilities. It would also help us market other productions that could appeal to them.

We also began running a late night comedy club in the Studio Theatre in the early 90s. Here you could see such comedians as Jo Brand and Geoff Green starting off their careers. We also programmed stand up comedians on a regular basis on the main stage through the year, yet again ensuring that we enticed a young adult audience into the theatre.

4. Community and education liaison projects, youth theatre work and collaborative projects with other companies should be developed
Community and education became two strands of work that transformed the Sherman in the ten years. Obviously, because of my own professional background, this work was of immense importance. I was adamant that the work we would create within the education, community, youth theatre and participation departments of the organisation should be a core activity of the theatre. Young people would be welcomed as artists and empowered to create, invent, and present.

The Youth Theatre work became central to the developing YPT policy of the theatre. In our corporate print we stated:

We are unique in Britain in putting a future generation centre stage alongside theatre professionals, together we create dynamic and immediate theatre of the highest quality that entertains, stimulates and educates. In this way we develop their understanding and opinions in key issues of today and tomorrow. We give young people a voice to make public statements about their ideas and thoughts. The Sherman Youth Theatre provides a safe, accessible and innovative forum in which young people can express themselves whilst hearing about and making theatre.

(Corporate Print, see portfolio box one)

Over the ten years we:

- Developed the youth theatre from one Saturday morning class to 12 youth groups with up to 300 participants between the ages of 10 – 25 years.
- Two of the groups worked solely in the Welsh language, one junior, one senior.
- The Youth Theatre regularly presented productions on the main stage and in the studio.
- The groups often performed on the streets of Cardiff.
- The Youth Theatre performed at national events like Contacting the World, International Youth Theatre Festival in Manchester and at the Urdd Eisteddfod (various venues).
- We developed an annual summer school at the Sherman for up to 50 participants. Young people involved with profession directors, actors, writers, designers, musical directors, and technicians to create a production annually at the Sherman over five weeks.
- We created a unique partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme (Wales) where young people could use their youth theatre experience towards their bronze, silver and gold DOE award programme.
- Created Acting Out Cardiff.

In partnership with Cardiff County Council Education Department and Schools Services we created Acting Out Cardiff. This project aimed at year 10 and 11 pupils as a part of Cardiff Shared Vocational Provision and Extended Opportunities Programme gave young people the opportunity to work in a professional theatre environment and create their own theatre under the guidance of professional theatre practitioners. Many of the participants were non-attenders at their schools. They came from schools throughout Cardiff and over the two years they could study for a BTEC qualification at the theatre. Often these were tough young people with short attention spans and very restricted life skills. They still had passion, ambition, and visions. The project was extremely successful with high and regular attendance figures. It was a unique project in the capital city and was only realised because of the Sherman's policy to create positive partnerships with the subsidised and private communities of the city.
• Set up a series of satellite youth theatres based in schools and community centres throughout the city.

• Invented St-Art Partners
Towards the end of the 90s we began to develop our outreach and educational work. We created St-Art Partners. Working with the private and business sector we sent directors, actors, writers and musicians to work with businesses to develop communication and life skills. Each partnership was uniquely created to the needs of the business partner. Ultimately these partnerships allowed us to identify new income and sponsorship streams and new audiences for the theatre.

• Created Venue 3
In 2000/01 we converted the upstairs gallery space in the Sherman foyer into Venue 3. We began developing the idea in 1999. Venue 3 was an experimental performance space that we made available, free of charge, to young actors, directors, writers, directors to present and develop new plays and ideas with a live audience.

• Alongside the above we also created Playdays, education resource/teaching packs, back stage tours, opportunity for young audiences to meet professional actors and numerous one off workshops for various schools and community groups.

5. The Theatre’s pricing policy should be reviewed in the light of its target audience

In partnership, the General Manager, the Senior Management Team and myself, created a three year rolling business plan that was accepted by the Board and the funding bodies. The year on year plan had a three year financial forecast and objective but a five year artistic vision. This business plan (see portfolio box one)
allowed staff, management board and funding authorities a chance to hear a shared realistic and achievable financial and artistic vision. For the first time in its existence the Sherman had a vision that could be shared with its staff, public, the media, press and its audience. The organisation was becoming artistically and financially sustainable and publicly accountable.

When inventing a young people's policy for a theatre, it is essential that the seat prices are kept at an affordable level. I was adamant that the only way that the theatre would attract a younger audience was by ensuring that our ticket prices corresponded with other leisure activities in the city, like cinemas and leisure clubs. We set ourselves the target of anyone being able to get into the theatre for £5. Essentially we were cutting the price of tickets, but by doubling the number of performances we were encouraging more people to use the building. Our gamble paid off and within 12 - 15 months, we had wiped out the deficit and the theatre was back on track and trading with a small surplus.

6. **Collaborations should be sought with the Welsh College of Music and Drama**

The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) based in Cardiff is Wales’ premiere conservatoire for emerging artists. In 1990 there was no relationship between the College and the Sherman. It was imperative that if the Sherman was to become a young people’s theatre then a meaningful and practical working relationship needed to be developed.

Throughout the 1990s this relationship, often a partnership, was developed by:

- Inviting the Head of Acting (RWCMD) to sit on the board of the Sherman.
• Artistic Director (AD) of Sherman taught on the acting course at RWCMD.
• AD of Sherman directed final production for RWCMD.
• AD of Sherman taught on and invented the Music in Theatre course with the Jazz Department of RWCMD.
• AD of Sherman taught on the design course of RWCMD.
• The Associate Director of the Sherman directed final productions of RWCMD.
• The RWCMD Drama Department presented three shows annually at the Sherman.
• The RWCMD Opera Department presented their final production annually at the Sherman.
• Head of Jazz at RWCMD composed for and musically directed numerous STC shows.
• Head of Design at RWCMD designed numerous shows for STC.
• Head of Staging at the Sherman taught flying techniques to 3rd year technical students annually.
• The General Manager of the Sherman taught annually on the Arts Marketing course at RWCMD.
• One of the design lecturers at RWCMD designed numerous shows for the Sherman.
• Head of Education and Participation at the Sherman taught for RWCMD.
• Numerous design student placements were offered by the Sherman to RWCMD students.
• Numerous marketing/administration student placements were offered by the Sherman to RWCMD students.
• Numerous stage management and technical placements were offered to RWCMD students.

7. Incorporation of new writing into the programme should be investigated
In order to develop a young people's policy the incorporation of new writing into the policy was vital. Young audiences are always hungry for new ideas and new developments. Their involvement in the music industry proves this. They write new songs, create new bands and invent new sounds continually. There are very few plays in the cannon of world theatre that exist for young audiences, particularly for main stages.

We developed strong partnerships with the writers of Wales over the ten years producing over one hundred new plays (many published). We also worked with writers outside of Wales. A full list of the commissions can be found in the portfolio (box one).

Working with the BBC Radio Wales drama producer, Alison Hindell we produced six, six week seasons of six new half hour dramas that were broadcast live from the Sherman studio on BBC Radio Theatre with an audience. The unique partnership allowed us to develop a strong lunchtime audience at the theatre alongside forging partnerships with Welsh writers interested in developing work for the radio. Writers such as Gillian Clarke, Tracey Spottiswood, Arnold Evans, Frank Vickery, Larry Allen, Helen Griffin and Roger Williams were all involved in this project. Thirty-six new radio plays were commissioned and broadcast.

As a result of this partnership we were able to appoint Charles Way as a shared Writer in Residence for twelve months between ourselves and BBC Radio Wales.

Another of our partnerships was with the drama department of the regional television company, HTV Wales. We pursued and created this work in partnership with the independent television company Penderyn Films. We created five series of work in as many years commissioning over thirty writers to write for the stage
and screen. The half-hour plays were performed live on stage at lunchtime and early evening at the Sherman (developing our lunchtime audience) for a week and then the following week they were filmed and consequently broadcast as a series entitled the Sherman Plays later in the year by HTV Wales. We experimented with the form throughout the five years of the project. As with all of our work we constantly experimented with the form of the product. In the first year of the HTV plays we produced the plays live on stage at lunchtimes and then took the productions in total, into the HTV studios and recorded the production on a multi-camera (four) shoot in front of a live audience. One year we shot the productions on a single camera in the studio without an audience and in the final year we shot all of the plays on location with a single camera. Our intention had been, throughout the project to retain a sense of theatricality. That is why we shot the first two seasons in the studios in front of a live audience. Eventually we realised that the plays worked better, and served both the writer and the production more positively by shooting the plays on location and allowing more time and expertise in the editing process. The theatre audiences were fantastic and on television we often had up to 37% of the audience share of the regional opt-out slot. They were very popular and audiences on stage and television were very loyal.

This work allowed us, once again to develop our work with our established writers such as Helen Griffin and Frank Vickery, but also to work with new writers to the Sherman, including Arnold Wesker, Ian Rowlands, Alan Osbourne, Labi Sifri and Nigel Crowle. Another strength for us as a theatre was the opportunity to work with more theatre/television directors, including Pennant Roberts, Michael Bogdanov, Huw Thomas and Annie Castledine.

This work also developed into publication. In partnership with the Drama Association of Wales, all the stage texts were published
and made available to amateur theatre companies throughout Britain and internationally. Many of these plays continue to be studied at schools and colleges and performed by theatre groups in diverse communities. Helen Griffiths’ play, *The Ark*, is constantly produced by amateur theatre companies all over the world, so too, are Frank Vickery’s *Bedside Manners* and *Green Favours*. There is no doubt it was because of the partnership between the Sherman, HTV and DAW that these plays had further productions. (Published scripts can be viewed in the portfolio box two)

Because of the vast amount of new writing we were developing and producing it became important to establish partnerships with the publishing houses. Alongside the Drama Association of Wales, many of our commissioned and produced plays were published by Samuel French Ltd, London, Seren Books, Wales and Parthian Books, Wales. (See portfolio box two)

Apart from working with dozens of established, new and emerging writers through the 90s, I developed extremely strong working relations with three particular writers, Mike Kenny, Charles Way and Frank Vickery.

I had had a long working relationship with Mike Kenny. Originally from north Wales, Mike had been a prominent member of the TIE movement throughout the 70s and 80s as an actor and a playwright. I had commissioned him to write for the Crucible Theatre in the 1980s. He had specialised in writing original work for the very young and adapting classic children’s books for the stage. Throughout the 1990s the partnership that developed with Mike was fundamental to the development of our work for the under fives in the studio and on tour. Many of the plays we commissioned from Mike had second productions by other YPT companies throughout Britain and internationally. Because of his
commitment to young audiences and young people’s literature his expertise in adapting such classic books as *The Snow Queen* (Hans Christian Anderson), *The Snow Spider* (Jenny Nimmo), *The Dark is Rising* (Susan Cooper) and *Matilda* (Roald Dahl) enabled us to create world stage premieres of these internationally recognised titles and therefore attract national attention for our pioneering work for young audiences on the main stage. (See listings of plays in portfolio box two)

Charles Way is a writer based in Abergavenny. He had worked extensively in young people’s theatre throughout Britain and had developed strong working relationships with such Wales based theatre companies as Gwent Theatre, Hi-jinx Theatre and Made In Wales. His work has the same strong reputation as Kenny’s, but because he was local, I was able to develop a relationship with him across the strands of our work. Consequently he wrote for STC, Sherman YT, the Summer School, and became our Writer in Residence in partnership with BBC Radio Wales. Charles has an international reputation. He has specialised in original work for young audiences on the main stage. Amongst the various commissions he completed for us throughout the 90s (see portfolio boxes two and three) he was extremely successful in creating original main stage dramas for young audiences with generic titles. Plays such as *The Secret Seven Save the World* and *Merlin and the Cave of Dreams* allowed us strong marketing titles at the box office, but at the same time allowed Charles to create his own dramatic structure and stay original inside the drama. Consequently these productions were not adaptations but original new plays for young audiences on the main stage.

Rhondda based writer, Frank Vickery, ran an extremely successful amateur theatre company in the South Wales Valleys that produced all his new plays. They presented them at large venues, including the Sherman throughout South Wales. In 1990 I
commissioned Frank to write his first comedy for the STC, *A Kiss on the Bottom* which we presented on the main stage and toured to the Grand Theatre Swansea. This was the beginning of a ten year partnership with Vickery during which time I commissioned eleven new plays for stage, TV and radio. Frank’s work is extremely popular at the box office. This ten year partnership allowed Frank to develop his unique gift for comedy writing and to experiment with theatrical form as can be seen in such plays as *Erogenous Zones, Pullin’ the Wool* and *Roots and Wings*. (see portfolio boxes two and three)

These writers all understood their audiences. I think it is significant that Mike Kenny, Charles Way and Frank Vickery all started their careers as actors. They had direct experience of working with their audiences and instinctively knew what worked in the theatre experience in terms of plot, language and points of engagement. This experience ensured that when they were writing for other actors they created a theatre experience, with their plays that had a relevance to their target audience and was at all times accessible in terms of form and content.

Developing a play is a long process. It can take up to two years to ensure that the play is ready for rehearsal and production. Alongside the unique relationship between writer and director it is important to expand the development process through workshops. Throughout the ten year period I constantly brought together groups of actors and designers to workshop the first draft of a new play. This process allowed the writer to sit back and hear her/his words read out loud with different voices and interpretations. The vital process of workshopping a new play enhances the development of text, and supports the writer in creating a strong, robust play that is fit and ready for rehearsals.
Putting new plays on stage is a vulnerable process. If a theatre company is producing Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* they know the play works, their job is to discover how it works and create their own original interpretation. New writing is different. No one has ever seen the play before (production company or audience). When it eventually arrives on stage, it is like a new born child vulnerable to an often harsh and critical world. A problem we encountered throughout this period for us to be able to produce new plays and give them enough time for development and ensure that we could support the work financially. We did not have a separate budget to commission and develop new plays consequently, the complete costs of commissioning, developing and producing had to be put into the box office targets. This continued to put an extraordinary financial burden on all new work.

A mistake I made, right from the beginning, was not to have created a separate commissioning and development budget. The Trickey report had recommended that we should investigate the possibility of incorporating new writing with the programme. In 1990, I was unaware how successful the new writing strand of our work would become. Had I established a stronger financial basis for the commissioning and development process I believe I would have created a much stronger, dangerous and experimental programme of new writing.

New writing is not just about creating traditional plays. It’s not about just words. A new writing policy should be about the creation of new theatre that reinvents both the form and content of the drama. Experimentation is extremely important, it energises writers, actors, directors and designers. It challenges audiences to view the world in a more complex way.

Had I have been brave enough to establish a new writing fund, in partnership with ACW and CCC, I know that we would have been
far more experimental in our creation of new plays. We would also have been able to work with a greater number of established and emerging writers.

Had I not been so box office dependant on known titles, there is no doubt that I would have been braver and commissioned and produced work that was more ‘original’ in its invention and not so recognisable with its title (eg adaptations). I would have commissioned more work along the lines of A Generation Arises that allowed for original invention by established and emerging writers. Also, by subsidising the product, so that it did not have to break even at the box office, I could have ensured that new plays did not have to play to large percentage box office returns, consequently I could have created pieces that were for small audiences of say 60 – 100. This would have ensured a full house and a stronger sense of the occasion. But this could only have been achieved with a greater subsidy, and we received no financial assistance from any of our funders for new writing. This, however, did not stop us producing over 100 new plays within the 1990s.

As a result of the amount of work we were producing we had developed strong working relationships with teams of writers, actors, designers and directors. Consequently we were beginning to see the start of an artistic creative ensemble at the Sherman. The artists found themselves writing, acting, designing, directing, for the main stage, studio, tours, TV and radio. We were creating a multi-disciplinary cross art form company.

The energy of all this work in the theatre was exciting. There were days when you could see a performance in the theatre at 10.00am, 10.30am, 1.00pm, 2.00pm, 2.30pm, 5.30pm, 6.30pm, 7.30pm, 8.00pm and late night. We were beginning to develop a
theatre building that was producing Welsh theatre at any time of the day to a variety of different audiences.

Alongside all this work being produced we continued to tour the work to communities throughout Wales in theatres, arts centres, schools and community centres. Towards the end of the 90s many of our shows were starting to tour nationally throughout Britain and beyond (Charlotte’s Web, The One Hundred and One Dalmatians, Fern Hill, Everything Must Go, A Spell of Cold Weather, Under Milk Wood, etc) and Under Milk Wood had toured the USA to sell out audiences for four weeks. It was important to us as a company that the work should be seen as far afield as possible to raise artistic awareness of the success of Welsh theatre as produced by the Sherman Theatre Company.

At our artistic height we were more than ‘just a theatre’. We were a meeting place, a part of the community, a school, a university of life, a pleasure palace, a platform for experiment and creators of the ‘new’. Artists were creating work, across the medias, in all parts of the building and in the community.

Without the artists, a theatre is just a venue. The soul of a theatre is in the hearts and imagination of its artists.

8. An improvement plan for the theatre should be drawn up and costed

The Sherman had been built in 1974 as part of a developing complex of buildings within the University of Cardiff. By 1990 the building seemed dated and institutionalised.

Now that the Sherman was an independent building it was important that the public should recognise it as a public building. We needed to redesign the building to be more people friendly. To
this end we applied for monies and completely rebuilt the front of the theatre with a glass conservatory. The public could see in and our patrons could see the real world. Alongside this development we:

- Repainted the foyer
- Created new logos and branding for the company
- Installed new (and disabled) toilets
- Created new signage in the foyer and back stage

By the year 2000 it became clear that a major capital investment was needed in the infrastructure of the building if it was to remain fit for purpose. A new roof was needed, the drains were failing, and the heating system was underpowered. There was no air conditioning and the office spaces were not of a high enough standard for the staff.

An application was made to the new ACW Lottery for a major refurbishment and re-design of the theatre in early 2000. It took till 2006 for the ACW to recognise the need for a refurbishment, if the theatre was to remain open and be fit for purpose.
Developing New Objectives and Targets Complimentary to the Trickey Recommendations

The Trickey recommendations provided a strong basis for developing our new policy. The implementation and development of those recommendations was in certain instances a long process, phased over many years with obtainable targets set in consultation with the company and the funding bodies.

There were other targets and objectives that needed to be set alongside the Trickey recommendations. These included:

1. Restructuring the Board of Trustees.
2. Developing the internal policies and create codes of practice.
3. Creating a dialogue with the artistic community of Wales and raise the profile of the Sherman nationally and internationally.

1. Restructure the Board of Trustees

The initial small board of trustees had done a terrific job of work in rescuing the Sherman Theatre when the university had closed its drama department in the mid eighties. They had set up the Sherman as a charity and successfully negotiated financial grant aid packages from the Welsh Arts Council, South Glamorgan County Council and Mid Glamorgan County Council.

The creation of the new policy for the company in 1990 offered an opportunity for the board to expand and restructure. Through negotiations with the trustees we set about establishing a series of sub committees that would service the main board. These included an artistic, financial, youth and education, marketing /
fundraising, staffing / equal opportunities and capital / premises / sub-committees.

Each committee was chaired by a member of the board and was empowered to co-opt practising professionals to sit on the relevant committee. This structure allowed for a greater investment and involvement from the wider community and also gave clear structure to board meetings with each chair making reports and recommendations. The board also had observers from the relevant funding bodies, myself as Chief Executive/Artistic Director, General Manager and an elective staff representative present at all their meetings. This was a positive development for the board, and when new directors/trustees were needed relevant participants from the sub-committees were nominated as directors.

2. Developing the internal policy and creating codes of practice

My appointment was not just as Artistic Director, but also as Chief Executive. My role was to reassess and indeed in some areas invent a machine or engine, a powerhouse of administration that would ensure that the artistic/cultural content of the organisation thrived in a supportive and professional environment. To this end as a senior management team we created a staff handbook that included policies pertaining to:

- Codes of Conduct
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Licensing opening times
- Staff discount scheme
- Child protection
- Guidelines for working with young people
- Data protection Act policy (1998)
- Equal opportunities
- Ethical sponsorship
Financial regulations
Grievance and disciplinary procedures
Harassment code of practice
Health and safety
Risk assessment
IT policy and procedures
Lone working policy
Placements procedure
Redundancy
Retirement
Smoking in the workspace
Stakeholders pension information
Vehicles and transport safety policy
Whistle blowing code of practice
Working time directive
(a copy of this handbook of working policies is included in the portfolio box one)

We also created:

A company mission statement
An employees appraisal process

These two policies, were extremely important in the development of the policy. The company mission statement (see portfolio box one) gave clear signals of intention and purpose for both the staff and the audience. With the mission statement we were able to measure our success; develop a clear identity; become more positive with our programming and ensure that all activities throughout the organisation adhered to the vision/mission statement.

The employees' appraisal process (see portfolio box one) was introduced in the mid – late 90s. I think it is fair to say that it was
greeted with some trepidation by everyone. Essentially everyone was appraised by their line manager. Staff were given appraisal forms that they filled out which allowed them to identify their achievements and future targets within an attainable working framework. Eventually the staff embraced the scheme, and found it extremely useful in terms of achieving professional goals and having a shared language between themselves and management. All staff had appraisals. My personal appraisal was with the board but I was never given an appraisal between 1990 and 2000.

Within five years we had computerised the complete organisation. (In 1990 there were only computers in the box office, marketing department and accounts department.) We achieved our first financial audit with no auditor recommendations. We re-structured the management team and by the year 2000 we had increased our private sponsorship by 200%.

3. Create a dialogue with the artistic community of Wales and raise the profile of the Sherman nationally and internationally

It is important that there is an artistic dialogue between the theatre companies and the artists of Wales. A primary aim for myself in 1990 was to begin this process. The Sherman Theatre Company had a reputation of being a London employer. That meant that a majority of its artists were London based and travelled to Cardiff to fulfil a contract. I made a policy decision to employ local, Welsh and Wales based artists as the core of our employment. In no way did I want the policy to be exclusively Welsh, only to prioritise. It was important that Welsh artists felt an ownership, and involvement in South Wales' only producing theatre. I knew I would not be able to please all the artists all of the time, but by prioritising this employment policy it was the beginning of developing a dialogue with the artistic community and sharing artistic dreams, visions and ambitions. My aim was to secure a
community of some 30 or 50 practitioners (actors, writers, directors, musicians, etc) who would become an extended artistic family for the company. This was exciting work. It meant that practitioners were able to be involved in planning stages developing new plays, workshopping new plays and develop a company ideology, and shared understanding of what it meant to create work for young audiences.

In order to achieve this we invited artists and arts practitioners to join the board of directors and sit on sub committees that would advise the board. For a number of seasons we pursued a policy of ‘through-casting’ which meant that a core team of actors were employed for a season and cast in a series of plays. This ensured an on-going dialogue with actors. Other artists including designers and lighting designers also work regularly with the company. We also initiated a programme of workshops to develop new plays with writers. A clear example of this was Fern Hill written by Mike Kenny and toured throughout Wales. Taking three of Dylan Thomas' poems, Fern Hill, Do not go Gentle into that Good Night and Death shall have no Dominion, a team of actors, designers and director worked with Mike Kenny exploring the themes of the poems and extracting common themes that provided the basis for a fictional drama that Kenny wrote targeted at teenagers.

By creating this constant dialogue with actors, we as a management team had direct access to the visions and ambitions of the artistic community. We also pursued the positive policy of the actors, designers, writers working with the STC working with the SYT, again ensuring that youth theatre work was at the centre of the theatre’s ideology.

Four producing theatres of Wales meetings
I initiated twice yearly meetings between the four producing theatres of Wales, namely, The Torch Theatre, Milford Haven,
Theatre Gwynedd, Bangor, Theatre Clwyd, Mold and ourselves. These were important meetings. It ensured that we shared artistic ideologies, possible exchange of our product that we offered for touring, a united voice for the development of Welsh Theatre and artistic partnerships in terms of co-productions and collaborations. Because the four companies were based in the far corners of Wales, our twice yearly meetings allowed us to combat isolation in a positive and constructive way.

**Welsh Networks**

As a company it was also important that we were part of the infrastructure of the Welsh Theatre Network. In the 90s there were three organisations, The Wales Association of Performing Arts (WAPA), the Presenting the Arts Group (PAG) and the General Arts Lobby for Wales (GALW) that were active in various ways. By being a member of these organisations it ensured that we had a dialogue with the producing theatre companies of Wales (WAPA), a positive working relationship with the presenting theatres (PAG) and a forum for developing Arts Policy for Wales through our membership of GALW which was set up to lobby for the arts to the prospective new Welsh Assembly candidates in the second half of the decade, I was elected chair of GALW.

**Co-production**

Creating partnerships with producing theatres in Wales and in England also became a priority. By working through co-production it allowed us to share our artistic objectives with other practitioners throughout Britain and for the productions to have a longer performance schedule. Throughout the 1990s we co-produced and collaborated with:

- Mappa Mundi Theatre Company, Cardiff
- Theatr Gwynedd, Bangor
- Hijinx Theatre, Cardiff
Theatr Iolo, Cardiff
Gwent Theatre, Abergavenny
Made In Wales Theatre Company, Cardiff
Theatr y Byd, Cardiff
The Torch Theatre, Milford Haven
The Unicorn Theatre for Young People, London
Polka Children’s Theatre, Wimbledon
Theatre Centre, London
The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry
Hampstead Theatre, London
Watershed Productions, Manchester
Vanessa Ford Productions, London
Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea
The Grand Theatre, Swansea
Actors Touring Company, London

Some examples of the above co-productions include:

Julius Caesar/Henry V, a double bill of Shakespeare entitled:
Rise and Fall 1997
We co-produced these two Shakespeare plays with the theatre company Mappa Mundi who were a project company based in Cardiff and had a reputation for producing Shakespeare plays and making them accessible to a contemporary audience. Together we applied to the ACW and won a Barclays Stage Partnership Award Scheme that funded the project. We used the same actors for both plays and presented them on alternative days on one standing set which was redressed for the specific needs of the particular play. We also produced teachers’ work packs to accompany the productions and because the plays were GCSE set text we provided workshops and play days to accompany the productions. We toured Rise and Fall throughout Wales.
By working in co-production we were able to combine the artistic objectives of both companies and ensure a unique experience for both the artists and the audiences of Wales. We could not have produced this double bill financially on our own or without the Barclays Stage Partnership Scheme.

Blodeuwedd / Women of Flowers 1992
Artists Touring Theatre (ATC) is a small touring theatre in England whose policy is to present classic plays from a European portfolio. The ATC director at the time was Ceri Sherlock, a Welshman. With money from ACW and ACE we commissioned Welsh playwright Sion Eirian to translate Saunders Lewis' play Blodenwedd from Welsh into English. (The play was also a set text in the Welsh language schools of Wales at GCSE level.) ATC and STC toured the production throughout Wales and England. One of the aims of the project was to make the writing of Welsh playwright Saunders Lewis more available to an English speaking audience in Wales and England.

Charlotte's Web by EB White 1996/7
We produced the classic children's book on the main stage as our Christmas show in 1996. In partnership with Watershed Productions, a commercial touring theatre company based in Manchester we toured the production to major scale, number one theatres throughout England for 14 weeks ensuring that our work was seen across the border in England and therefore raising the profile of the STC.

Under the Bed by Brendan Murray 1995
This new play for children under five was a co-production between STC and Theatre Centre, London. Theatre Centre is a national touring YPT that prioritises new writing for young audiences. The production toured the South Wales Valleys, was resident for five weeks at the Sherman for Christmas 1995 and toured to theatres
in England in spring 1996. This project was the beginning of a long term relationship with Theatre Centre when we co-produced three projects with this company.

**Flesh and Blood by Helen Griffin 2000**
This new play, by Welsh playwright Helen Griffin was co-produced with Hampstead Theatre in London. It toured Wales and then played a residency in London. I will talk in detail about the production later in the paper.

Co-producing ensured that we could create more theatre, develop strong artistic partnerships with other producing theatres companies and give a longer life to the production by touring it throughout Britain. Co-producing does not save a company money, but it does ensure a longer life for the productions in the long term.

**National and international networks**
As part of our professional working practice the Sherman Theatre had constant dialogue with British Actors Equity (actors union) and the Theatre Managers Association (TMA). We were also active members of the National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT) the International Forum for Young People’s Theatres (ASSITEJ) and Action for Children’s Arts (ACA). Our membership of these organisations allowed for a greater international understanding and positive networking opportunities.

**Personal commitment**
Personally over the ten years I served on the management boards of:

Theatr Iolo, Cardiff
Llanover Hall Arts Centre
BBC Wales (Broadcast Council for Wales BCW)
Theatr y Byd - Chair
The Roald Dahl Trust (Wales)
General Arts Lobby Wales (GALW) - Chair
Actors Centre, London – Associate
Dogo Films, Cardiff
Cardiff Jazz Composers Orchestra
Brecon Jazz International
Arts Council of Wales (Young People’s Theatre panel)
South East Wales Arts Association (SEWAA)

I was also on the judging panel for the Meyer Whitworth Award for new writing (Arts Council of England), BBC Wales Arts Award and various BAFTA Cymru committees. My involvement with these organisations allowed me an extended dialogue with the artistic community in Wales.

Touring
Throughout the decade we toured our performance work to venues in Wales. This was important for us to ensure that our work for young audiences was seen by a wider community. Alongside our touring work in Wales we developed a national touring programme with work seen throughout Britain. Often we developed this work in partnership with other companies including Theatre Centre, London, Watershed Productions, Manchester, The Unicorn Theatre for Young People in London, the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, the Actors Touring Company, London and Vanessa Ford Productions, London.

Alongside our British work we also began to work internationally with our 1994 production of *Under Milk Wood* touring throughout North America.
Towards a National Theatre for Wales

In the mid 90s I began working with the international theatre director, Michael Bogdanov to develop a policy and vision document for the establishing of a National Theatre for Wales. Michael had returned to live in Wales and I had worked with him on various projects in the 70s and 80s. We were both passionate about Welsh theatre.

The document proposed a non-building based theatre company working on a federal basis with the established theatre companies of Wales. This federal National Theatre would create projects in English and Welsh of national importance throughout Wales and the world. (see portfolio box two)

In our vision, Michael and I proposed a collective artistic process that liberated the artistic product from regionalism and possible isolation. A federal system as in the theatre structures of Germany, would challenge the concepts of tribalism and territorialism in Welsh theatre and ensure that the theatre practitioners of Wales collectively owned and shared its national theatre.

The document caused a great amount of debate. It was not the first time a national theatre for Wales had been suggested – far from it – but it was the first federal model. What was important for both of us was to give Welsh theatre a higher status in the world market. We wanted to achieve it by the end of the millennium in order that the proposed new Welsh government could develop such an initiative with status.

With the backing and encouragement of Geraint Talfan Davies, the then Controller of BBC Wales, we organised meetings with politicians, arts workers, the local authorities in the north and south of Wales. We also did presentations to the Wales Association of
Performing Arts (WAPA) and the actors’ union, Equity. Heated and energised discussions arose.

In *Staging Wales* Anna-Marie Taylor commented on the proposal:

> Whilst Michael Bogdanov’s and Phil Clark’s proposal for a National Theatre should be welcomed for its vision of theatrical activity across Wales underpinned by training, archival and educational initiatives, the stated aim that those working outside Wales may be attracted back seems to miss an important point. The strength of Welsh theatre since 1979 (and indeed before) lies in the abilities of those who stayed, and who have tried to establish types of playing and repertoire that are culturally appropriate to a linguistically and geographically divided and often overlooked country.

(Taylor, 1997, p44)

Needless to say, we did not achieve our objective, but we ruffled a few feathers and asked some questions as to the status of theatre and the arts in a democratic Wales. Essentially we both believed, and still do, that collaboration is the only way forward for the cultural industries in such a small but vibrant country as Wales.

All of this work was extremely important to me as it ensured that I was in touch with current artistic and political thinking. There is a great danger of isolation when you run a building. Pursuing these positive partnerships ensured that I was continually challenged and stimulated by current debates, which I could positively feed back directly into my work at the Sherman.

**Announce the Artistic Season**

**Sherman Theatre Company 1990-1991**

There was no doubt that the success of the new policy would stand or fall by the success of the productions that the STC created and presented. I had a very short time in which to create
the 1990-1991 season. Alongside choosing the relevant titles for the season, I had to ensure that there was enough lead-in time to commission writers to create new plays relevant to the new policy. As I devised the first season of twelve months work it became vital to have a view to the second season 1991 - 92. During the first season I needed to commission the writers for the work that would be presented in year two. This became the pattern of my working process throughout the 90s. There is no way that you can create one season at a time, you must constantly be working two to three years ahead of yourself in order to ensure that you develop audiences and new plays.

**First Season 1990-91**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author/Adaptor</th>
<th>Venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 1990</td>
<td><em>The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13¾</em></td>
<td>Sue Townsend</td>
<td>(main stage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1990</td>
<td><em>Up ‘n’ Under</em></td>
<td>John Godber</td>
<td>(main stage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct./Nov. 1990</td>
<td><em>The Caretaker</em></td>
<td>Harold Pinter</td>
<td>(main stage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov./Jan. 1990/91</td>
<td><em>The Snow Spider</em></td>
<td>Jenny Nimmo, adapted by Mike Kenny</td>
<td>(main stage and tour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1990</td>
<td><em>The Lost Child</em></td>
<td>Mike Kenny</td>
<td>(studio and tour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb./March 1991</td>
<td><em>Ash on a Young Man’s Sleeve</em></td>
<td>Dannie Abse adapted by Charles Way</td>
<td>(main stage)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13¾*

by Sue Townsend

Sue Townsend’s writing had been extremely popular throughout the 1980s. Adrian Mole was a classic adolescent. Young people and adults were reading her books. The musical play, Adrian Mole, had played extremely successfully in theatres throughout Britain and in London’s West End. I chose the play because it was a popularist title that had a young person at the centre of its drama allowing me to introduce the issues that concerned young people on to the
main stage with status. I also felt it was a strong bridge between the more traditional work of the STC in the past and the projected more contemporary work that would evolve for young audiences over the next ten years.

- **Up 'n' Under by John Godber**
  Godber had been one of the most successful dramatists of the 1980s. His new plays for Hull Truck Theatre Company had been exciting and popularist. Many repertory theatres throughout Britain had programmed the work of Hull Truck and created their own versions of Godber's new plays. There was an excitement in his plays that profile the lives of often ordinary people from working class communities. He had placed working class people centre stage and celebrated their lives within a dramatic context. Up 'n' Under concerns a rugby team (originally Yorkshire) and because of Wales' obsession with rugby I felt this was an opportunity to attract that 18 - 30 year old audience for the first time to the Sherman.

- **The Caretaker by Harold Pinter**
  Pinter was one of the most prolific playwrights in Britain in the second half of the 20th Century. Audiences were hungry for his writing. Working with the Director, Annie Castledine, I wanted to ensure that we created a piece of theatre that was vital and remained contemporary. Castledine had been extremely prolific for the prior 20 years profiling the role of women in the theatre as writers, actors, designers and directors. She made a bold and brave decision to cast the well known actress Miriam Karlin as the caretaker. This would be the first time that the role had been played by a woman. Such a decision, I believe was in keeping with a young persons' policy. It ensured that the text was relevant to the broad debates of contemporary Britain. Castledine throughout her career had pioneered work by women playwrights and ensured
that large, decent, and intelligent roles were written for actresses. As a result of this work she had worked with a large community of strong British actresses. She believed that the Caretaker role at the centre of Pinter’s play was not the sole prerogative of male ideology. Women too, like the Caretaker were outsiders, hence the reason for casting Miriam Karlin. Castledine, in casting a woman in this all male play, made the production more accessible to a wider audience, and therefore asked more questions of its audience.

- **The Snow Spider by Jenny Nimmo**
  Based in mid Wales, Jenny Nimmo, was a prolific writer for children and young people. In 1989, her magical book, *The Snow Spider* which constantly made reference to the Mabinogian (Wales’ greatest book for young people) had been televised by HTV Wales. It had been a terrific success. I felt it was important not to lose any time, and commission a writer I had worked with for many years, Mike Kenny, to make an adaptation for the stage. His adaptation was for 8 professional actors and a community cast of 15 young people. This production allowed me not only to create theatre from contemporary young people’s fiction, but to put young people themselves centre stage alongside the professional actors.

- **The Lost Child by Mike Kenny**
  I had developed work for 3 - 5 year old children with Mike Kenny whilst I was at the Crucible in Sheffield. At this time very few companies were making theatre for the very young. I had commissioned Kenny to write *The Lost Child* in 1989. I decided to include the play, with a new production in the first season, because it was important to invent and develop this work in Wales. By creating work for the very young, you also automatically involve the parents who are often in the 20 - 30 year old age range. By programming and creating such
important work we were developing the audiences for the future and targeting young adults and getting them into the theatre, often for the first time.

*Ash on a Young Man’s Sleeve* by Dannie Abse

Abse is one of Wales' greatest writers. He is a poet, novelist, playwright and commentator. His work is extremely well known and much respected. His novel, *Ash on a Young Man’s Sleeve*, set in Cardiff during the Second World War is centred around a group of teenagers. The book was also a set text at GCSE examination level. This was to become an extremely important part of the STC work throughout the 90s. I felt it was a very necessary development of the company's work to stage books and plays that were studied by young people for examination at the Sherman. It allowed the young audience to experience the text in a live and dramatic context. I also believe that such experience gave the young people a deeper understanding of the text emotionally. I asked Charles Way, an extremely experienced playwright for young audiences (based in Abergavenny) to work with Dannie and create the stage adaptation.

Of the six plays that we created in the first season there had been two new commissions to writers. All the work had had a contemporary relevance to a young audience and much of it, had strong links to Wales. We had employed mostly Welsh actors, toured our work throughout Wales (*The Lost Child* and the *Snow Spider*) begun to create working partnerships with Welsh/Wales based writers (Way, Abse, Kenny and Nimmo) and we had begun to raise the profile of the STC as a young people’s theatre company.

Alongside the above productions, I had begun to structure the 1991/92 season. In order for it to be successful, I had to
commission the writers in 1990/91 in order for them to deliver the work for the 91/92 season.

Six new commissions were given in 90/91 to the following writers:

- **Brendan Murray**
  Murray had been my writer in residence at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield. I had secured the rights for a stage adaptation of Hanif Kureishi's film *My Beautiful Launderette*, an extremely poignant film that explored the relationship between a young Asian teenager and a working class skinhead. The theme once again placed young people centre stage, and allowed me to develop multi-racial casting and deal with themes relevant to the multicultural city of Cardiff.

- **Frank Vickery**
  Vickery was an established Valleys based writer who wrote predominantly for his own amateur company, The Parc and Dare Theatre Company based in Treorchy in the Rhondda valley. I had programmed his work into the theatre. His plays were all set in the South Wales Valleys and their working class communities. Essentially he is a comedy writer. His amateur company packed out the theatre for a full week. No one had ever approached Vickery to work for the STC. I met with him and we discussed various options for a new play for the main stage. Eventually he wrote *A Kiss on the Bottom*, an all women play set in a women's cancer ward of a valleys hospital. The play included characters from many generations ranging from 18 year olds to 70 year olds. It is a known fact that most theatre tickets in Britain are bought by women. Here was an opportunity to capitalise on Vickery's established audience and develop it in keeping with the target audience of the new policy, after all there was no other living playwright in Wales who could write new plays and pack out the theatre.
Sian Edwards

In order to develop our audience, I decided to commission a Welsh language translation of Mike Kenny’s play for the very young, *The Lost Child*, that we presented in 1990. Sian Edwards is a much respected translator in Wales. With her new translation *Y Plentynn Coll*, we toured to Welsh language audiences throughout South Wales.

Sion Eirian

Eirian is one of Wales’ most respected poets, playwright and television writers. He writes predominantly in the Welsh language. He is one of Wales’ youngest ever crowned bards. Eirian had approached me to make an adaptation of the classic novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. He wanted to set the novel in South Wales and place it in Cardiff Bay. It was an exciting proposition. Young audiences love the horror movies. They packed out late night showings of gothic horror moves in the cinemas. Here was a new opportunity to attract a younger audience and create a highly theatrical but literary based drama on a well known theme.

Mike Kenny

Two commissions were given to Mike Kenny. Because I had a long term working relationship with Kenny it was important for me to work with writers that I knew and respected alongside developing relationships with new writers in Wales.

The first of these commissions was for a sequel to *The Lost Child* (1990/91 season). *The Pathway Home*, although a stand alone play, was a sequel to *The Lost Child*, and developed the 3 - 5 year old audience.
The second was for a stage adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. Dahl was born and raised in Cardiff. His books had become world classics for young people. There had never been stage adaptation of any of his books in Cardiff. I decided this would be a terrific development of the main stage Christmas audience and allowed us to develop young people's literature by Welsh writers at the theatre.

All of the above new plays and adaptations were presented by the STC in my second season 91/92 along with productions of *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas and *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare (both GCSE set examination texts). All of the new plays were workshoped and developed into rehearsal scripts for the second season in 1990/91. All of these writers continued to work with the STC throughout our ten years 1990 – 2000 creating new plays and adaptations for the main stage and studio theatres. The investment in these writers at an early stage within the ten years ensured a positive and creative partnership throughout the 90s placing the STC as a foremost creator of new writing in Wales and Britain.

(for a full list of writers commissions see portfolio box two)

This first season and the commissions to the writers for season two was the beginning of a ten year programme of work. We began to establish strong relationships with our writers and a pattern of positive programming which included, new work on the main stage at Christmas for 7 - 12 year olds, new plays for the very young in the studio and on tour, the presentation of examination set texts, an annual new play from Frank Vickery, and other contemporary plays commissioned that were relevant to our target audiences and complemented my programming of established texts.
Three Year Appraisal by the Arts Council of Wales
Three Year Appraisal by the Arts Council of Wales

In the 1990s it was the ACW practice to carry out appraisals with all their revenue clients.

After the first three years we welcomed the opportunity for an appraisal with the Arts Council of Wales to assess our achievements and set new objectives.

This process can be very daunting. It happens over a number of days with ACW officers and arts experts employed to create a team that can work across the varied disciplines of the theatre. Initially, some of the staff found the idea a little threatening, but it was important for us as a staff, to have an outside objective assessment of the work.

The first three years of the policy had demanded an enormous commitment from the staff, and a terrific energy. An appraisal was a positive way to give feedback to the staff and set realistic objectives for the next three years.

The results and full documentation of the appraisal can be found in the portfolio, *Report of an Appraisal Team, Arts Council of Wales, April 1994.* (See portfolio box one)

Its main recommendation was that:

- a greater priority now be given to Sherman Theatre Company projects and to substantially increase Sherman Theatre Company productions and performances on the main stage.

Along with,

- predominant feeling as having nothing but admiration for the artistic policy, the commitment and achievements particularly with such limited resources.
As a result of the appraisal we as a management team, in consultation with the appraisal review document identified the following objectives to be prioritised:

- to raise the status of the STC
- to create more STC shows
- to reduce the amount of bought in programme
- the bought in programme needed a clear remit within the core activity of the theatre
- the YPT remit of the theatre needed to be demystified for the staff and the audience
- a clear distinction needed to be made between STC productions and bought in productions
- a costing exercise needed to happen and expand the STC season and reduce the bought in programme
- a marketing exercise needed to be put into practice to sustain longer runs of the STC productions
- we needed to increase the STC fees and wages
- we should cost a writer in residence
- introduce a 5% management fee on all touring
- reassess the role of associate director and develop strategic links for the post with the established staffing structures of the building
- redefine the core artistic activity
- reassess all job descriptions and ensure new targets are obtainable within the present structure
- re-establish the post of education officer
- reduce the target from 90% to 60% of local artist employment
- establish a young writer’s scheme
- board should consider a sabbatical for the artistic director
- raise the profile of the Youth Theatre
- introduce a system of valuation for staff and product
- re-assess the working practices of the board
- expand the administration team
The appraisal had proved extremely useful. All of the recommendations, and indeed the full report were made available to SMT and staff. With new priorities having been identified, the SMT set about putting into practice ways in which the objectives could be realised across the departments. Because of the positive response from the appraisal team the staff were invigorated and ambitious to strive for the new obtainable objectives.

Everything was going well. Our audiences had increased and we were well into establishing the company as a major capital venue for young people's theatre. The Arts Council of Wales wanted to invest. We were looking at expansion, growth and investment in the Sherman at long last.

I had completed four years work, the Arts Council were happy, the local authority were happy, the Board of Directors was happy. Four years was a respectable time for any Artistic Director to move on, but the Arts Council promised a new investment in their appraisal review. I wanted to reap a little of the rewards for putting the company back on its feet. I stayed with 'hope in my heart' for a new Sherman and the early rumblings of a new independent Wales.
The Consequences of a Reconstituted and Restructured Wales relevant to the Sherman Theatre
The Consequences of a Restructured Wales relevant to the Sherman

In the last five years of the millennium we were to see two major changes to the political, economic and democratic structures of Wales. In 1996 the Government introduced the strategy for local government reorganisation. In 1999 as a result of the public ballot box the National Assembly for Wales was established (now known as Welsh Assembly Government, WAG). The 1996 strategy for local government reorganisation was a devastating catastrophe for the Sherman Theatre.

Prior to the Act, the Sherman had been funded by the ACW in partnership with South Glamorgan County Council and Mid Glamorgan County Council. With the new act, South and Mid Glamorgan County Councils were disbanded. The South Glamorgan County Council, our biggest local authority funder was split into two local authorities, Cardiff County Council and the Vale of Glamorgan County Council. Cardiff kept their financial commitment to the Sherman, whilst the Vale of Glamorgan withdrew all financial support, basically because the theatre was not physically in their authority (but did indeed serve its residents). Mid Glamorgan became Rhondda Cynon Taff County Council and they too withdrew their funding. In one fell swoop, the Sherman lost nearly £80k of its funding, which it would never be able to recover.

We fought hard and proved to the Vale of Glamorgan County Council that a large percentage of our audience came from the Vale. We produced all the figures to back our argument, but they still refused to fund us. The same argument was put to Rhondda Cynon Taff County Council but they too refused to fund the Sherman. Consequently the only producing theatre in South Wales was dependent on one local authority, Cardiff County Council, for its entire money in partnership with the ACW. We knew that our audiences came from a 30 mile radius of Cardiff, including the Vale of Glamorgan and Rhondda Cynon Taff.
Following this devastation we amassed a deficit which corresponded to the amount of money that we lost due to reorganisation. We never increased the deficit, but we were never able to reduce it, because the trading levels of the organisation were realistically budgeted reflecting the output of product.

The ACW did not have a strong working partnership with the local authorities of Wales and were unable to fight successfully for our cause. The Welsh Office did nothing to help the situation. Other Welsh theatre companies also suffered from this financial devastation due to local government reorganisation.

We managed, with a strong relationship with our bank, to keep the theatre open. But year on year, as Cardiff County Council only gave us standstill grants, and the same from ACW, the situation worsened. Due to our commitment to the staff, through the unions we had to offer the inflationary salaries to our workers. As is usual, the world trades at inflationary pricing, therefore the theatre had to trade with other traders at inflationary levels, yet we received no inflation from our funders. We could have increased our ticket prices, but we believed this would reduce our young audiences.

As a result of local government re-organisation, we had stood still and in many instances gone backwards.

The major moveable financial figures in all subsidised producing theatres are those that are attached to productions. Most other areas are fixed costs, ie staffing, capital, heating, maintenance, etc, but all of these are subject to annual inflation. Consequently we had to reduce our costs on our own productions, fewer actors, smaller production budgets, etc. Within this devastating situation we were clear that our commitment had to be to our audience. If we lost them, then the building would close. Because a majority of our work was for young people and children, who have no economic power or independence in the world, we knew that if
we increased our ticket prices above inflation, it would be our death. So as the second half of the 90s progressed, we were aware that we could no longer create the amount of artistic product that we had in the first half of the decade.

The Board of Management of the theatre recognised that had we not lost the money through local government reorganisation and had the new ACW and CCC given us standard inflation on our grants then the company would have been trading solvently. What this meant for the organisation over the coming years was twofold. We needed to:

1. Recover the £80,000 shortfall in our funding by lobbying our funders and finding new income streams that led to profit.
2. Lobby the funders to give us standard inflation on our grants allowing us not to have to increase seat prices for younger audiences.

In order to recover the £80,000 it was important for us to lobby funders and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), but by the end of the 90s we were unsuccessful in achieving this goal. As a result we carried forward the deficit until the end of the millennium. We employed a fundraiser to help us identify new monies through charities and the private sector, but it became clear to us that although charities and private sector clients were able to give us new monies, they also wanted us to create new work, consequently their monies were used to fund the projects that they funded. These projects were self sufficient financially at a break-even financial level and consequently we were unable to raise the extra monies to deal with the deficit.

In terms of the inflation situation, it was clear that as a business we had to trade at inflationary rates within our agreements with the unions. Also all our other trading areas and expenditure were at inflationary rates, ie buying paint, wood, marketing print, etc etc, so it was important that we lobbied the funders to recognise and award us inflation on our grants.
We did increase our seat prices a little, but we did not want to lose our audiences by pricing our product out of the market.

By 2000 we had not achieved our goal. We had failed to replace £80,000 and the inflation. The bank understood the situation and allowed us to trade with the deficit. So instead of being able to put all our money into the product we were paying bank charges, which we believed to be a misuse of public monies.

We had to think positively as to how we would maintain our artistic standards in this devastating financial situation. We were adamant that we would not lose our commitment to young people and particularly our youth theatre work. We stabilised the work of the Youth Theatre financially by ensuring that what we earned through box office of YT shows and the termly fees of the participants guaranteed us a break-even situation to pay the Youth Theatre staff wages and production costs. Because of this tight budgeting we were unable to look at artistic growth in the department that demanded financial assistance. The positive point was that we sustained this activity, the negative was a lack of growth.

In terms of the STC work, this situation had a strong knock-on effect to productions. We reduced all the production costs; used only in-house directors; and severely reduced the cast size of any show. Consequently by the end of the nineties we were unable to produce any large cast productions. As I note later in this paper, productions such as *Flesh and Blood* had four actors, *Everything Must Go*, six actors, *Talking Heads*, three actors and *Puff the Magic Dragon*, two actors. No longer could we afford to make large pieces of theatre unless we had strong partnerships with other organisations. One way I did deal with this was to work with the RWCMD who provided a chorus of some 20 first year students who performed in *Everything Must Go* at no cost to us as an organisation. (See video in portfolio box 3) We also managed to maintain our partnership with BBC Wales and continued to present the BBC Sherman Lunchtime plays with no cost to us as an organisation.
The difficulty with this devastating situation was that we were unable to plan for the future in an ambitious way. We were becoming 'mainstream engineers' and not 'engineers of imagination'. We were unable to commission new plays, and we had to select plays for production and presenting that would ensure a break-even financial situation.

The other consequence of this situation was our relationship with the other companies that we bought in and programmed. Throughout the early 1990s we were able to give financial guarantees to these companies because the ACW gave us programming monies over and above our grants. By the mid 1990s the ACW had stopped giving programming monies to organisations so we had to ensure a financial/positive relationship with all the companies with no extra programming monies. Where we had been able to offer guarantee fees to companies we now had to offer box office splits and hope we would achieve the financial targets.

All of this work, put an enormous stress on the organisation, and particularly the staff. We began to see a fast change over in staff, as employees went to work for other organisations that allowed them to grow and not just maintain. A very understandable situation. Essentially, because of low wage levels, the Sherman employed a lot of permanent staff who were at the beginning of their careers. They were energised and ambitious. As the stand-still situation worsened at the theatre, these talented and ambitious young people left the organisation to gain a greater experience in a more positive work situation. This often meant they left Wales to work in England.

As this situation worsened, we began to realise that by 1998, we had to make drastic changes if the organisation were to survive. This led to employing the arts consultant, Peter Boyden to work with us and create a document that would realistically state a positive way forward. More of this later in my paper.
This concludes my ten year overview as Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the Sherman Theatre. What follows is a case study of my artistic work in the year 2000 and a series of examples of my artistic practice.

It is perhaps ironic that within the theatre profession, most artistic directors begin their careers by studying theatre at drama school or university and often begin their professional practice as actors. We train as theatre makers. When we then run theatre buildings we also become executive directors running the business of the organisation, for which we have had very little formal training. That said, it is important to realise and recognise that creating any piece of theatre is also like running a business. As director of a production you are constantly concerned with leadership, organisation, scheduling, budget control, interviews and casting, the appropriateness of the product to the target audience, meeting deadlines, ensuring strong team play, rigorous research and a strong sense of collective ownership of the product.

The objective of any theatre director is to ensure a strong and stable marriage between the executive and artistic processes and therefore determine that each has an equal status and understanding within the philosophy and mission of the organisation.
The Year 2000

By the year 2000, it was important that the Board of Management and staff of the Sherman should make a realistic statement to the WAG and the funding bodies as to how they thought the Sherman Theatre could and should survive into the future.

In order to examine this situation I will explore a number of situations, namely:

- The political and social climate in which the artistic product of the year 2000 was created
- The production work of the STC in 2000
- The Millennium Challenge
- Personal Productions of the Year 2000
- Conclusions of the Work in the Year 2000

This section of the paper deals predominantly with the artistic product of the company that should have secured the organisation's survival, and walked hand in hand with the SMT's work with Peter Boyden to outline and project a strategic and financial survival.
I have chosen to examine the work of the Sherman Theatre Company in the year 2000 for a number of reasons. Primarily the artistic product of 2000 demonstrates how the artistic policy had developed over ten years. It shows how the partnerships with established writers such as Frank Vickery, Mike Kenny and Terry Deary developed alongside the continued investment in emerging writers such as Helen Griffin, Roger Williams and Patrick Jones matured. This continued investment throughout the ten years allowed the company to develop a positive dialogue with the writers and ensure that we could create a quality artistic product on stage, television and radio.

Through comparison with the artistic work of 1990/91, recorded earlier in these writings, this chapter will demonstrate how the Sherman responded to the aspirations of Welsh writers, actors, directors and designers by investing in their work over ten years in order to create theatre that reflected the maturity and aspirations of its artistic community.

Alongside these artistic inspirations, the year 2000 was an important season for the Sherman Theatre Company. It allowed us to create new Welsh theatre and tour it throughout Britain and give the company its first ever residency in London. The millennium also allowed us to positively demonstrate the impact that devolution had had upon the cultural/artistic communities of Wales. Devolution and the then newly formed Welsh Assembly Government encouraged us to raise the status of Welsh theatre and demonstrate a confidence in our process and product. Consequently our work throughout 2000 always strived to identify new artists and new audiences with a view to demonstrating to the world that Wales had a culture of continuous artistic invention and evolution.
The political and social climate in which the artistic product of the year 2000 was created

The period of 1998 - 2000 was extremely politically, socially and economically turbulent within South Wales. No one public institution was sailing on calm waters. The newly formed National Assembly of Wales (NAW) was amidst a cultural review of the nation, with a view to creating a cultural strategy for Wales. At the same time the NAW had implemented a review of the Arts Council of Wales (ACW). The NAW rejected the ACW proposed new drama strategy. The proposed Wales Millennium Centre was still in the balance. The ACW and Cardiff County Council (CCC) our two major funders had still not instigated a strategy review for the arts buildings in Cardiff (it had been on hold for five years). It was eventually implemented in 2001. Cardiff Marketing were undertaking research with the arts practitioners of the city into cultural facilities within the capital. CCC had initiated research into raising the profile of the capital as a European city. The Wales Tourist Board (WTB) were constructing a Cultural Tourism Strategy for Wales. Newport Council were investigating the building of their own professional middle-scale presenting theatre. The Welsh College of Music and Drama (WCMD) were proposing and developing plans for a major capital expansion of the college. The multicultural arts workers of Cardiff in partnership with CADMAD were proposing a new multicultural arts centre in the Bay, and Cardiff County Council announced their intention to bid for the franchise of European Cultural Capital for 2008.

All of the above initiatives had implications on the work of the Sherman Theatre. As chief executive of the organisation I had been consulted, taken part in, and served on panels pertaining to all the above initiatives. As an artist who had to create the season of artistic work and direct some eight productions personally, I would inevitably take with me all the cultural baggage of the city and the nation that sat alongside the process of making a piece of theatre. It is perhaps the political climate and
cultural context that energises and informs one as an artist and the work that I create. I cannot and will not work in isolation.

I desire and need the outside world in order to find a purpose for my work and create a dialogue with other artists and actors within the rehearsal room. I know many artists do not work this way, but for me the role of chief executive and artistic director, as a single entity is essential to me in the creation of my work.

Throughout my career, my work has always had a relevance to contemporary society. When working in TIE, it is necessary and therefore inevitable that the work a theatre company devises and creates has a direct relevance to the lives of the participants. When working in Bruvvers Theatre Company in the 70s and 80s the theatre programmes we created were a direct response to issues in society that teachers and young people often struggled with within the confines of the school environment and curriculum. The productions we created to be performed within the schools, allowed a distance for the teacher to discuss the issues.

In the mid to late 70s there was a growth of the National Front (NF) movement which was targeted at working class communities. The cultural communities of Britain responded positively to this situation. The Anti Nazi League was formed and fought racism in communities. Large events like Rock Against Racism were created to counteract and challenge the growth of the National Front, often focusing on young people and helping them to understand the danger of the issues and policies. Bruvvers created a production of No Pasaran by David Holman which toured to secondary schools in the north east, which charted the growth of fascism that led to the Cable Street Riots of the 1930s in London's east end and the growth of the fascist Black Shirt movement led by Oswald Mosley. The power of this piece of theatre demonstrated to young people the disastrous and dangerous consequences of fascist thought and actions. By using history, we were able to give the facts of
the situation to young people, and they were then able to make the connection to contemporary relevance and the growth of the NF movement within their community. It also allowed the teacher to talk about the issues, without having to raise them themselves and therefore protect their professionalism but ensure their responsibility as educationalists to raise the issues within an educational context.

Whilst I was still working in the north east, I worked with a community drama group in South Shields, Tyne & Wear. We met on a weekly basis and created devised theatre that was based on the participants' life experiences. In 1984, at the height of the national miners strike, we produced an adaptation of Alan Platter's classic play *Close the Coalhouse Door* that charted the history of the miners unions in the north east. We toured the play to the mining communities of the north east throughout 1984 and the production raised money in each of the venues that was given directly to the miners hardship funds. Each venue would pack out, because the content of the drama was directly relevant to contemporary life. It raised the debate within the community of the role of democracy and the right to work.

In 1988 I was working in Sheffield as director of TIE and Community Theatre, at the Crucible Theatre. The government had proposed a new bill to Parliament known as Clause 28 that forbid the positive promotion of homosexuality in schools. There were national demonstrations opposing the bill, on the grounds that is demonised the existence of lesbians and gay men within society. I commissioned a play from the playwright Noel Greig (a founder member of the Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company) that exposed the issues of Clause 28 and the direct relevance to young people. We toured the play, *Plague of Innocence* to schools throughout Yorkshire and to national conferences in Britain and Canada. At this time the AIDS debate was at its height in society and I felt it was important to produce a piece of theatre that exposed the themes for debate by young people.
In 1994 in his introduction to Gay Plays 5 Michael Wilcox comments on the situation in Britain concerning the Clause 28 issues and realises the important work that TIE can do to create positive dialogue within a difficult situation.

Theatre-in-Education (TIE) companies throughout Britain have been performing AIDS related programmes to schools and colleges, to provide information and promote safer sexual habits. This is both a response to Clause 28, which legislates against positive images of homosexuality in schools, or even on local authority property at any time of the day or night, and partly to counterbalance Gay Plague hysteria. At a recent seminar on AIDS on the stage at the London's Theatre Museum, representatives from Gay Sweatshop protested strongly about the number of heterosexual AIDS plays being toured to schools. For purely political and legal reasons the experiences of gay people was too often a footnote in such plays, rather than their central focus. However, Noel Grieg’s Plague of Innocence is an exceptional example of TIE work, both in form and content. Those who saw the original production found the experience overwhelming and unforgettable. In the form of a dramatic poem, Greig depicts the closing seconds of the century. He doesn’t specify the number of actors or the distribution of lines or include any stage directions. That such a piece should be written and presented as part of a TIE programme says much for the generally unheralded and unsung work of hundreds of poorly paid theatre workers who perform regularly in non-theatre venues throughout Britain.

(Wilcox, 1999, p viii)

This was dangerous work for us as theatre workers. The Local Authority in Sheffield monitored the work closely in case we were breaking the law and therefore jeopardising our grant from the Local Authority. The production won numerous national awards and it was exciting and important to us as theatre makers for young people to again create work that had a direct relevance to their lives.

In planning the 2000 artistic programme for the Sherman I included two plays by Valleys playwright Patrick Jones Everything Must Go and Unprotected Sex. In the introduction to the plays that were published by Parthian Press in 2001 I commented:
Although his work is dark, Jones is optimistic and often hopeful. The Belfast Telegraph wrote of ‘Everything Must Go’: ‘This is a country with no industry to call its own, with massive unemployment, whose young people grow up believing that they can have everything, but are given none of the tools they need to lead their lives. Northern Ireland may have been bad, but at least there’s a War to blame. Wales has been left on the slag heap and who’s to blame for that?’ Consequently, there is no denying the piece’s power to speak to a young audience.’ (The Guardian)

‘Everything Must Go’ was produced in association with the Manic Street Preachers and supported by a soundtrack which included the Manic Street Preachers, Stereophonics and Catatonia. The play is a fusion of music and theatre in which one art form serves to complement, enlighten and enrich the other. The result is an extraordinary piece of theatre which encompasses, and also challenges, all that has become known as ‘Cool Cymru’. The Independent commented, ‘Jones’ first play drinks deeply from the well of assonance and ancient traditions of Welsh lyricism.’

Whilst Everything Must Go is a very Welsh play, it is essentially a collage of modern Britain at the time of the millennium. The themes it explores, such as unemployment, industrialisation, disenchantment with New Labour and drug abuse, are issues that remain universal to communities across Britain. The Daily Telegraph observed that ‘...voices the feelings of a whole generation’, and The Western Mail commented that it was ‘a thrilling moment of Welsh theatre’.

Patrick Jones’ second play, ‘Unprotected Sex’, again commissioned and presented by the Sherman Theatre in 1999, includes many of the themes of ‘Everything Must Go’, but is a play that begins to examine maleness. ‘It is a brave and powerful exploration of the harm caused by the emotional repression inherent in traditional male culture.’ (The Independent)

The play is, again, set in the South Wales Valleys, and centres around Gary, a deserter from the Kosovo conflict who still insists on wearing his army kit. He has witnessed the atrocities of Kosovo and, although a deserter, cannot escape the exploding bombs and images in his mind. But there is a limit to his girlfriend’s tolerance. Upstairs their neighbour, Denver, has been bullied by Gary as a child and, seeking refuge amongst the mountain ponies, has witnessed his own atrocities – the mindless murder of a pregnant mare. ‘Unprotected Sex’ is a play which demands reaction from the audience; often brutal, Jones explores relationships and the
sheer torrent of words is irresistible. 'A chamber piece of pain,' declared The Independent.

(Jones/Clark 2001, p133)

A third play I included in the season was *Flesh and Blood* by Swansea writer Helen Griffin. Helen had discovered that there was a Ku Klux Klan sect in Maesteg in the South Wales Valleys that targeted young people, inviting them to join them and share their racist and fascist ideology towards black and Asian people and immigrants in Britain. These themes were extremely relevant to the lives of young people at the time, and I felt it was important to stage this production that challenged these fascist views.

I will talk further about these productions later in this paper, but these productions demonstrate that for me the issues that exist within society are of great relevance to the work we create in contemporary theatre, if the work that we are producing is going to have a relevance to its audience. Consequently, when I am in the rehearsal room, it is important that I am aware of the outside world, and find positive ways of including the contemporary issues of society not just in the rehearsal but within the ethos of the theatre, that must lay claim to the ownership of the on-stage product with authority.

I live my artistic life and create theatre under a simple dictate. Why am I creating the work, what work am I creating and how will I create it? In that absolute order. Until I can truthfully understand and answer the 'why' I cannot advance to the 'what' and consequently the 'how'. I do not believe in form before content, I truly believe that content and the understanding of that content will lead to a natural creation of the form.

It is said, often ironically, that the world does not trust artists. I spend a great amount of my time assuring the bureaucrats of local and national democracy that an artist can make executive decisions at a high level and that their (systems) mistrust is often not of the person but of art itself.
Half of me is angry that such a situation exists, my other half is joyful and challenged that art and artists can remain threatening and have the power to question democracy with status. If theatre/art has a role within society it is to question and to hold up a mirror to the world. There are many levels of disturbance to be agitated. We are often told to not rock the boat.

From 1975 – 1984 when I worked with Bruvvers Theatre Company in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (a collective) our mission statement said ‘We exist to raise questions, not necessarily to provide answers’. Today I still agree with that statement, but I now also want to contribute to the answers.

Drama and theatre have the potential to empower young people. If a young person is empowered and respected then their status is higher in society. They feel a part of the community, an equal citizen with rights and a voice that is listened to. They, like any other citizen, have a perspective, opinion and sometimes different attitude to the often unjust world. It is important that they feel valued and worthwhile. When they are treated as part of a democratic society, then and only then, do they learn how to negotiate in the world, and engage in the opportunity to implement and inform change.

Theatre can use disturbance to place the audience at the centre of the drama. It is important that the audience has empathy with the main protagonist in the drama. If the audience does not care about the characters then they fail to become involved in the theatre.

There are many levels of disturbance within theatre and often extremely dangerous moments when an audience laughs, cries, is angry etc. A well constructed piece of theatre has analysed and plotted these moments with clear objectives as to what it intends its audience to feel at any precise moment.
Balancing a season

Constructing a season of plays for the STC was quite a complicated process. It began with an analysis of audience and their needs. One dominant market is the main stage Christmas show, which primarily targets a 7 – 12 year old audience and their families alongside the teachers and the educational curriculum. The second is the work for the very young. A third market is the GCSE or A level set text. By 2000 we had, over ten years, established an annual production by Frank Vickery and built up a loyal audience. A fourth market was the summer show for schools and family. This had been an experiment within this year and it was vital that the work should be popular and of relevance to key stage 2 of the National Curriculum. For four years we had established a lunchtime audience with our work with BBC Radio Wales and HTV. We had also begun to be brave by creating new writing pieces for teenage and young adult audiences such as *Everything Must Go* and although aimed at audiences of 16 – 25 years, the work was opening markets to the general public.

Within the construction of any season our audiences could experience a variety of new writing and set texts. It was possible to see a Shakespeare play, and an established contemporary text, but we always thought carefully how to make them relevant to a young audience.

It was important that we balanced the programme between established titles and new plays, but at all times we had to be realistic in projecting the box office targets, bearing in mind that we were a subsidised public venue and that the distribution of public monies is allocated across the needs to young people between the ages of 3 – 25 years. Alongside this responsibility must sit, vision, danger, excitement, relevance, high quality performance and professionalism.
The Production Work of the Sherman Theatre Company (STC) in the Year 2000

The majority of this section pertains to the work of the Sherman Theatre Company (STC) in the year 2000, and more specifically the work that I personally commissioned and directed.

It will remain predominantly in the artistic domain of the work, but where necessary refer to the managerial structures that pertain to my dual role of artistic director and chief executive.

In order to observe the artistic programming of the company in the calendar year of 2000 it is important to note that the organisation operates on a financial year of April to April. Consequently the millennium year of 2000 straddled two financial years. There are therefore, productions prior to the actual year that need to be considered in the artistic balance of the programme. For the purpose of this paper I will include STC artistic productions from June 1999 to December 2000.

This will include 16 productions of which 12 were commissioned new plays and three were second productions of new plays. I personally directed eight of these productions.

Each artistic (and financial year) is divided into three seasons. Summer Season (April – August) Autumn Season (September – December) and Spring Season (January – March).

I will concentrate on the eight productions that I created but the complete season of STC work, for which I was the overall producer as Artistic Director and Chief Executive, was as follows:
Summer 1999 May/June

*Horrible Histories – the Mad Millennium* new play
By Terry Deary
Director: Phil Clark     Designer: Sean Crowley
Musical Director: Matthew Bailey     Lighting: Ceri James
Main stage     Target audience: 8 – 12 year olds

A new play by the celebrated children’s author, Terry Deary that examined the horrible historic events of the last millennium. Based around a group of ten pupils in a school, the play concerned itself with the details and events of history that are often excluded from the school curriculum.

Autumn 1999 October/November

*Unprotected Sex* new play
By Patrick Jones
Director: Phil Clark     Designer: Jane Linz Roberts
Musical Director: James Dean Bradfield     Lighting: Ceri James
Studio Theatre     Target audience: 16 – 25 year olds

Patrick Jones second play for young audiences focused on the confusion of young men often trapped in their masculinity. The drama centred around a young deserter soldier and his relationship with his wife.

Autumn 1999 November/December/January

*The Twits* 2nd production
By Roald Dahl, adapted for stage by David Wood
Director: Kathy Leahy     Designer: Tom Conroy
Lighting Designer: Ceri James
Collaboration with the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry
Main stage     Target audience: 7 – 12 year olds

This main stage Christmas show was an adaptation of Roald Dahl’s highly imaginative book *The Twits*. The play was concerned with the greed of human beings and explored man’s relationship with the animal kingdom.
Autumn 1999 November/December/January

**The Elves and the Shoemakers** 2nd production
Adapted for stage by Mike Kenny
Director: Matthew Bailey Designer: Tina Reeves
Music by: Matthew Bailey & Paul Gardiner
Lighting: Chris Illingworth
Studio Theatre and community tour Target audience: under 7s
Hans Christian Andersen’s beautiful story about two shoemakers and the invisible help they are given by the elves in the middle of the night to complete their hectic workload.

Spring 2000 February/March

**More Talking Heads**
By Alan Bennett
Director: Matthew Bailey Designer: Jo Hughes
Lighting Designer: Ceri James
Studio Theatre and tour Target audience: 16 +
Three of Bennett’s poignant monologues, *A Chip in the Sugar, Soldiering On* and *A Cream Cracker Under the Settee*, staged simultaneously in an interlinked adaptation for the stage.

Spring 2000 April/May

**Flesh and Blood**
By Helen Griffin new play
Director: Phil Clark Designer: Sean Crowley
Music: Mike Peters Lightning Designer: Jason Taylor
Main stage and tour Target audience: 16 +
Four week residency at Hampstead Theatre, London
Swansea writer Helen Griffin’s play set in a council house on the Town Hill estate in Swansea created around a family that is struggling with its racist attitudes.
Spring 2000 May/June/July

Everything Must Go new play
By Patrick Jones
Director: Phil Clark Designer: Jane Linz Roberts
Lightning Designer: Ceri James
Main stage and national tour Target audience: 14 – 30 year olds
Four week residency at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith London
A restaging of Patrick Jones' highly successful 1999 play that concerned itself with a group of young disaffected valley adults intent on gaining revenge upon society.

Summer 2000 June/July

Sherman Theatre/Radio Wales Lunchtime Plays 6 new plays
Broadcast live from the Sherman Studio Theatre

New Laughs for a New Wales

Mustn't Grumble by Helen Griffin Director: Alison Hindell
The Member for Penbanog by Tim Rhys Director: Alison Hindell
Pushy by Roger Williams Director: Phil Clark
Now You See It by Tracy Spottiswoode Director: Alison Hindell
Up the Bay, Down the Docks by Lawrence Allan Director: Alison Hindell
We Are What We Are by Arnold Evans Director: Phil Clark

Autumn 2000 September/October

All's Fair
By Frank Vickery
Director: Phil Clark Designer: Jane Linz Roberts
Lighting Designer: Mo Hemmings
Main stage and tour Target audience: adult and WJEC GCSE set text
Vickery's (GCSE set text for schools) war time play set in the Rhondda Valleys during the Second World Ward, explores the 'fairness' of war as experienced by a Valleys’ family and their struggle to survive.
Autumn 2000 October/November/December

**Puff the Magic Dragon**

By Mike Kenny

Director: Erica Eirian  
Designer: Andrew Harrison

Music by: Paula Gardiner  
Lighting Designer: Chris Illingworth

Studio theatre and tour  
Target audience under 7s

Collaboration with Polka Children's Theatre London

Originally a well known children's song, Mike Kenny's new play explored the relationship between a young boy, Little Jackie Taper, and an imaginary dragon, Puff.

Autumn 2000

**Horrible Histories – Crackers Christmas**

By Terry Deary

Director: Phil Clark  
Designer: Sean Crowley

Music by: Greg Palmer  
Lighting Designer: Ceri James

Main stage  
Target audience: 7 years and above

A roller-coaster of a ride through time visiting Christmas stories from around the world and right back in time to the original Christmas story in Bethlehem. A new adventure play by Terry Deary.
The Millennium Challenge

It was somehow inevitable that the millennium year of 2000 would set a challenge to the artistic imagination and invention across the cultural domains. A challenge I was not to escape.

I remember, there was in 1998/99 a feeling inside me of dilemma between the excitement of the challenge and being its inevitable victim.

The challenge was to create an important artistic statement to commemorate the millennium, but I felt a victim of this self imposed challenge, the result of which would be just one statement amongst thousands of other artistic statements all vying to be THE ‘cultural statement of the moment’. What could it be? Who should be saying it? How dangerous could I be? Who would judge its worthiness of uniqueness? Who would applaud its individual achievement? Who would award it its millennium greatness status?

I did feel it was important to create a new piece of theatre that everyone would talk about, genuinely enjoy and recognise its uniqueness with its time, moment and place.


What should have been the challenge of that year, and in fact of any year, was to create a solid programme of work that reflected the artistic policy and mission statement of the Sherman Theatre Company.

(see portfolio box one)
In the year 2000 I personally directed eight of the STC productions.

The personal projects being:

1. *Horrible Histories – the Mad Millennium* by Terry Deary (main stage)
2. *Unprotected Sex* by Patrick Jones (studio theatre)
3. *Flesh and Blood* by Helen Griffin (main stage and tour)
4. *Everything Must Go* by Patrick Jones (main stage and tour)
5. *Pushy* by Roger Williams (live BBC Radio Wales broadcast from the studio)
6. *We Are What We Are* by Arnold Evans (Live BBC Radio Wales broadcast from the studio)
7. *All’s Fair* by Frank Vickery (main stage and tour)
8. *Horrible Histories – Cracker Christmas* by Terry Deary (main stage)
My Personal Productions of the Year 2000

1. **Horrible Histories – The Mad Millennium**

In 1970 (I had just finished school) I worked as a founder member of Breconshire Theatre Company, Wales (now known as Theatr Powys). In that original company was an actor/teacher called Terry Deary. During the 1990s long after his acting days, Terry established himself as a prominent writer for young people. He had invented a successful history book series for young people known as the ‘The Horrible Histories’. Under this title he had invented such award winning books as *The Terrible Tudors, The Groovy Greeks, The Vile Victorians*, etc. The clever part of Deary’s invention was in fact twofold. Firstly he talked about the people in history and the horrible bits which young people wanted to learn about and secondly, the books were for young people and did not need adults to help them interpret them. So in fact you could see Deary translating the aims and objectives of child-centred learning within the Theatre-in-Education movement, of which he had been an active member, into children’s literature. Because of the incredible success of these books and the historical significance of the millennium it seemed opportunist and relevant to commission Deary to write a millennium play for young people.

By 1999 no one had commissioned Deary to write for the stage and after various discussions with Deary and his publishers, Scholastic, it was decided that with money obtained from the National Lottery the Sherman would commission Deary to write *Horrible Histories – the Mad Millennium* to be staged by the STC in June 1999.

In the late 60s, throughout the 70s and early 80s many regional theatres had presented young people’s theatre plays on the main
stage and marketed it as a ‘summer treat’ alongside the annual summer trip at the end of the academic year. That tradition had disappeared by the late 80s.

We knew it would be difficult to persuade the schools to bring young people to the theatre in June, due to SATS exam demands, so we devised an extensive education project which accompanied the production. The content of Terry’s script would be aligned to Key Stage 3 of the National Curriculum. This would help the teachers justify their visit educationally. Also teachers could identify the cross curriculum opportunities with relevance to drama, English and history.

One of the fantastic things about Terry Deary’s work is the way he places the content of his books in the young people’s domain. As a result the audience for the show, is child led, ie ‘Mum take me to see ….’ ‘Sir, take us to see ….’ Just as you see young people in bookshops choosing their own books and demanding that the adults pay.

This is a culture that theatre has to exploit and encourage. Film, TV and cartoons do it all the time. The marketing of Pokeman was far more impressive that the product itself.

Putting the world premiere of Horrible Histories on stage had many advantages and in terms of box office alone it was a terrific success. In a way, we were being exploitative, trading on the success of the books to attract a theatre audience. Because of the dire financial situation of the theatre we knew we had to be popularist to attract audiences. At least we were attempting something new and creating a world premiere. It reached its targets at the box office. It had a fantastic marketing buzz. But what about it artistically? Like the books the language of the script was corny, crude, cranky and often cringe making – and it was
important to remember that these were the qualities that had made the books successful and why young people loved them. Often the actors would find the content difficult – but in performance the audience just loved it. The form and structure of the drama however, was quite a traditional adventure story. The holding form for the retelling of various sections of historical fact in the last millennium was a little far fetched and quite old fashioned in its quirkiness, a bit Famous Five meets St Trinians in Byker Grove during school hours.

What the script did allow us to do as a company was pursue a very inventive, poor theatre approach, not dissimilar to the community theatre movement of the 1970s, or the retelling of the Mystery Plays at the National Theatre, London in the 80s and the emergence of the Reduced Shakespeare Company style in the 90s. All of course have their heart in the same initiative that Peter Brook talked about in *The Open Space*.

> I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.
> (Brook, 1988, op 1)

These productions were simple, storytelling theatre that relied on actors’ skills to provoke the imagination and invention. I certainly took into the rehearsal period the above influences, plus the work I had done with Bruvvers Theatre, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, my work at the Crucible and with Youth Theatre and community companies.

I knew I wanted to create a piece of theatre that was accessible, non-patronising, inventive and provocative. I wanted the young audience to care about the characters, the plot and what happened in history. I believe we achieved this. Many teachers
talked about how, through the medium of theatre, the facts had stuck in the young people's minds, in other words they had learnt something. The inventiveness of the style, the use of music and basically the relationship that the actors had with the audience, were the key to our success.

This last point is perhaps the most provocative. How does any piece of art have a relationship with its audience.

Primarily, within theatre, I believe that this is all to do with emotion and the audience cares about what is happening to the characters on stage, and are there inciting incidents that involve the audience and place them at the centre of the dramatic action.

A clear example of an inciting incident can be found in Hamlet. Hamlet's father has been murdered. Hamlet is lost emotionally and disturbed. The ghost of Hamlet's father appears to Hamlet, he says, "Revenge my death" Hamlet agrees.

So if the ghost hadn't appeared to Hamlet, the rest of the play could not have happened. Therefore the appearance of the ghost is the inciting incident of the play that engages our protagonist, Hamlet, and the audience on the journey of revenge.

With any piece of theatre, the point of engagement with its audience is crucial. The audience must care about what is happening on stage. When this has been established the journey can begin, and through a well structured plot and recognisable characters the engagement can be exploited and explored with the aim of ensuring that the audience are captivated throughout the adventure. Theatre that ignores these basic principles will fail and lose its audience.
Alongside the onstage engagement with the audience, theatres have an important objective to achieve, to ensure that there is a positive point of engagement between itself and recognised organisations, eg schools, youth clubs etc. This objective ensures that a dialogue on inclusiveness exists between client and the theatre. Such a positive dialogue often ensures return and regular visits. This can be achieved through various activities, many of which we pursued throughout our work at the Sherman, eg workshops, teachers' packs, question and answer talk backs with the actors and audience, actors visiting schools to promote the show, in-set teachers' workshops, teachers being interested to be on advisory panels to influence the theatre's policy, and open days at the theatre where schools can tour the building and see all the work spaces of a producing theatre.

The relationship and engagement of a piece of theatre with its audience is paramount. Alongside this priority it is essential that the theatre has a relationship with the school. In terms of young people's theatre, particularly here in Britain today, I believe we are light years away from the debates that existed in the late 70s, early 80s between teachers and theatre practitioners.

It is necessary here to recognise the pioneering partnership work between artists in theatres and teachers in schools that developed in the late 1960s and into the mid 1970s that gave birth to the Theatre-in-Education (TIE) movement.

In 1968 at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, a group of actors and teachers, under the direction of Stuart Bennet, invented Theatre-in-Education (TIE), a form of theatre that would spread throughout Britain, which would have education authorities setting up and funding TIE companies on their own and in partnership with local theatres in places like Leeds, Bolton, Rochdale, Newcastle-upon-
Tyne, Ipswich, London (3), Bristol, Liverpool, Mold, Swansea, Greenwich, Peterborough, Nottingham, Sheffield, Cardiff, York and Watford who all offered TIE free to local schools. By 1980, a partnership and dialogue existed between schools and regional theatres, which was based on a shared understanding of 'how a child learns'. There was no need for a justification to bring young people to the theatres, or for the theatre to visit schools. A unique professional partnership existed that was concerned solely with the educational needs of young people and the broadening of cultural and social understanding.

So what was TIE? Throughout the 1950s and 60s there had been a long tradition of children's and young people's theatre in Britain and throughout the world. Most of this work was theatre performed by professional actors for young people in theatres or in schools. The young people were the audience.

TIE was a new and different performance technique. By using actor/teachers a piece of theatre was devised, usually for one class unit, where the young people were participants inside the play. Therefore they could be in role as coal miners at the centre of a dispute with the coal owners or town planners creating a new town. Essentially the young people had responsibility and had to make decisions which would, inform and on times change the outcome of the piece of theatre. The participants were empowered throughout the piece of theatre and were responsible for their own democratic actions. Consequently the young people were at the centres of their own learning. The role of the actor/teachers, who also played characters within the drama, was to impart not just the circumstances of the drama but guide the young people through the theatrical plot by imparting information that would/could inform the decisions made by the young participants.
TIE could not be performed therefore to groups of 100 young people like YPT or CT. It was essential that it worked with a small group of no more that two class units at a time.

By 1990 TIE, due to Government cutbacks and cultural policy changes, had virtually disappeared. What had been the jewel in British theatre’s crown, a timely British invention and the envy of the world, by the 1990s was disappearing.

Inevitably what also disappeared was the dialogue between the repertory company and schools and inevitably a sense of trust and shared professionalism.

What I was aiming for with the Mad Millennium, was to inspire an auditorium of young people who would say ten years later – that show touched, changed, disturbed my life. It gave me knowledge, it celebrated invention and it gave a purpose to art in their lives. It also put young teenagers’ characters centre-stage, in celebration with all their faults.

I also wanted to give the teachers the ammunition to say ‘Yes, it was worth it, Yes the children learnt something, and Yes it was educational’. I realised that all this is about a justification rather than trusting the piece of theatre I have created to stand alone in its own right as a worthwhile piece of contemporary theatre, but that’s the real demands of the market place in which a theatre has to trade.

In order to create a main stage piece of YPT in June/July you have to subsidise it. It cannot stand alone financially on its box office returns and also your prices have to be reasonable. What was important was that the success of Mad Millennium would inform the marketing brief and production style for the Horrible Histories
Crackers Christmas which would have a greater financial strain upon it as a Christmas show.

We had created a summer show that was popular with its audience and supported educationally by the schools. Alongside the production we had presented numerous community workshops in schools and youth clubs that complimented the production, throughout Cardiff.

Our aim with this production was to introduce young people to the history of the last millennium, and to learn from the content. It was important that the young people understood the relevance of the Battle of Hastings and its consequence on the structure of British governance; the vicious and appalling attitudes of Henry VIII to women, wives and the values of the family; the brutal poverty in Britain during the Victorian era; and the devastation that two World Wars had brought not just to Britain, but the world. The play aimed to introduce young people to the role of history in the modern school curriculum. It was another way of exploring Saunders Lewis' ideology that 'there is no hope for Wales until a generation arises that knows its own past'. The production asked the audience to question what history meant to them. How relevant the mistakes and achievement of people in the past were to contemporary society. What indeed can we learn from history? We felt that if the audience began to see the relevance of these stories to their own existence today, perhaps they would view their present education and history classes in a new light, giving themselves a stronger understanding of the curriculum's relevance.

By taking young people out of the school environment it gives them a new perspective and a welcome distance to assess the institution of school and its long term objectives. The Mad Millennium was an exciting project, and as we came to the end of
the millennium, it seemed important to create a piece of theatre that was reflective, and through reflection face the challenges of a new millennium.

**Unprotected Sex, by Patrick Jones**

In March 1999 the STC had staged Patrick’s first play, *Everything Must Go* (EMG) to sell-out audiences and varied critical success. More importantly we had created a buzz, a controversy. Comments on the play ranged from ‘brilliant’ to ‘shite’. This to me was fantastic. There was a dilemma caused by a piece of theatre. People were talking about it. Interestingly, over 60% of the EMG audience were first time theatre attendees at the Sherman. How was I to get them back? How did I keep them coming? What else did they want? The same questions that pertain to *the Horrible Histories*.

There is no doubt that a core of this 16+ audience did attend the Sherman for events like *Shopping and Fucking*, by Mark Ravenhill, produced by Out of Joint Theatre, *Train Spotting*, by Irvine Welsh and *Comedians* etc (all bought in productions). But EMG was Welsh. This was new writing. This was controversial. This reflected very much the state of Wales and the dominant culture of Welsh rock music.

My decision was to commission Patrick immediately to write a new play about different issues. A new play with new music in a new space. The result, *Unprotected Sex*, Autumn 1999, performed in the Studio Theatre.

I realised half way through the project that because Patrick was a new playwright I had placed far too much pressure on him in a short space of time to create a fully crafted text. In retrospect I feel I was right to commission a second play but I should have allowed
a much longer development time before programming the play for production. It is useful to observe this dilemma though. Once you have got an audience how do you hold on to them, particularly a new and young one. One of the biggest problems of new writing in general is the demand placed upon it for immediate production. There had been no time in the ten years of my running the Sherman, when I have commissioned a writer that I have not had to produce the play. So how does this work? Basically there was no commissioning money in the budgets of the Sherman Theatre so the cost of a new play commission was put into the overall cost of the production and was costed against projected box office returns and other income (sponsorship).

This process had been the same for over one hundred new plays at the Sherman. The pressure it puts on the production is quite intolerable. The ‘right to fail’ factor does not exist. Consequently there were times when the writing had not had a vigorous enough workshop process to help its development and natural growth. *Unprotected Sex* was one of these pieces.

*Unprotected Sex* is a very dark piece of writing from Jones, which, to be fair, is his natural demeanour. But the piece lacked optimism, hope and humour. Patrick, at the time of writing, was adamant that he didn’t want to write another Welsh play. He wanted the piece to be universal, but to be predominantly concerned with maleness. It is a very male/heterosexual piece but ironically its main through strand is the same as *EMG* – revenge. At the time of writing he was going through a break up in his relationship and he had a lot of anger inside him towards the state because of the way that so much support was and is offered to women in these instances. Patrick interprets this as a gross injustice. Essentially it is these factors that fuelled the writing of the play, particularly with reference to the custody of the children within the relationship break up.
A question I have to ask myself is why I was supportive to writing such a piece. Firstly when I am working with a writer I only make one demand of them – that they write their best play ever. I know this can sound flippant but in essence I believe in this philosophy. Every artist must at any time seek to achieve their best. After all no one sets out to fail. Secondly, I too am fascinated by maleness. Throughout the 1970s and the early 80s I had been politically active with the men’s movement in British society and the Gay Liberation Front. I had been on endless marches for lowering the age of consent or to oppose Clause 28. I had performed with various Gay Theatre Companies, alongside being an active member of Tyneside Men’s Consciousness Raising Group, being a founder member. I had organised conferences on gender for the Standing Conference of Young People’s Theatre (SCYPT) as well as being an active member of Tyneside Friend and run Tyneside Gay Teenager Group for some four years.

Having been a part of this exciting development in social history in the 70s I had great empathy with Patrick Jones and his need to understand and decode his maleness. His struggle was not a solitary one but was shared by many men of various sexualities. It was certainly an issue that was relevant to young men. I welcomed these issues being raised in a male dominated rugby/sport infatuated country. He would inevitably deal with taboos and levels of disturbance within his audience.

All this had great resonances for me. There was the distinct possibility of a piece of theatre that was not ‘usual’ for Wales. It could upset people. It could be totally unpatriotic. It could raise questions.

Two of the original members of the cast of EMG agreed to be in the production alongside the same designer and lighting designer.
So here was a real opportunity for development with a group of artists who were dedicated, passionate and loyal to Patrick and what he had to say.

Two factors militated against the success of the play, the first being the one I've already mentioned – not enough time to create a coherent enough piece of writing, and secondly, Patrick Jones didn't know what he wanted to say or how to say it.

What is interesting in my relationship with Patrick is that I am an experienced director of new plays and Patrick is a poet. He has written a couple of plays but he still does not understand the structure of drama or indeed dramatic story telling, consequently there is no adherence to structure, plot, plot development, inciting incidents, character development etc. To a certain extent Patrick is intolerant to these 'traditional' structures. He often answers the question ‘why’ with ‘why not’ and you often end up at loggerheads.

What Patrick sometimes fails to understand is the audience’s need. They need structure and engagement but Patrick is totally concerned with what he wants to say and how he wants to say it. If you don’t like either the content or the form that’s your problem not his.

What this does often mean is it puts an extreme pressure on the actors, directors and designers to liberate the text. In fact, after day one of rehearsal, I as the director went away and overnight, cut, re-ordered and rewrote all of Act One using his language. The actors spent a lot of time reworking the text into the language of their character, the designer created a performance space that resembled a military assault course, which is what I asked for and together we ensured that the acrobatics of Patrick’s language made sense and was accessible. We did not in any way change the context. It was Patrick’s play and what was being said was
Patrick's point of view. This was not a collective voice although the process at the time had had elements of collectivity, but ultimately we animated Patrick's ideology.

This is often a difficult process, as not necessarily do the company agree with what the writer is saying, particularly if he hasn't finished writing the play before rehearsals start.

The play had some exciting and electric moments. It was certainly dangerous and I think it was terrific that James Dean Bradfield, of the Manic Street Preachers, wrote a complete new score of music for the play – and terrific music at that. But largely my haste to catch the audience in the wake of EMG had in fact led me to make the wrong artistic decisions. Consequently, the product we created fell at most hurdles.

The more annoying factor for me is that having created such a strong artistic team, who did indeed liberate the shortfallings of the text and production, we missed an opportunity for both Patrick and myself to make an important statement about maleness. I know to this day Patrick, like myself, still feels he has something stronger, more coherent and powerful to say on the subject.

This or course is a clear example of form before content. I should have known better.

Flesh and Blood by Helen Griffin

Helen Griffin's play had been written for some time. It was originally commissioned by Theatre West Glamorgan, who did not produce it, but did workshop it for development. Helen herself staged a script-in-hand production in Dempsey's, the pub theatre venue in Cardiff. Consequently, when I came to work on the play
with Helen it had had a substantial development period. It showed.

From 1990 I had worked extensively with Helen as an actor and a writer. She had been in numerous productions including, *Under Milk Wood*, *Matilda*, *A Taste of Honey* and *101 Dalmatians* as a performer. In the early 90s she had started play writing and prior to *Flesh and Blood* I had directed various of her plays including *A Generation Arises*, *The Ark*, and *Mental* (with Jo Brand). I had also directed one of her plays for BBC Radio Wales and *Mental* for HTV.

I had, from an early version, been extremely excited by *Flesh and Blood*. It had been entered for the Verity Bargate Play writers award scheme. It had not won but it was runner up. Consequently many important people had read the piece and recognised its importance and strength.

Among these was Jenny Topper, Artistic Director of Hampstead Theatre, London. After various negotiations it was agreed that we would produce the play at the Sherman Theatre in association with Hampstead Theatre who would present the production for a four week run in Hampstead, London.

The play is constructed around social issues, injustice and humour. All the work that I had created with Theatre Powys, Bruvvers Theatre Company, Tyne and Wear TIE Company and Crucible TIE Company had been constructed around the same issues as had my work with young people as a teacher at Benfield School, Newcastle and as a leader of youth theatre in South Tyneside and Tyneside Gay Teenagers Group. I was more than aware of young people’s attitude to injustice, as instigators, perpetuators and victims. Alongside the social issues Helen had constructed a tight narrative, well rounded and believable
characters, a strong plot, a clear use of emotion and glorious dialogue riddled with fantastic humour. There was a great sense of danger about the play. It was set in a working class house in Townhill, Swansea and my aim was to give the audience the feeling of being inside this family living room so that when the emotions, slander, accusations, etc were thrown it would affect all the audience. Because of the issues in the play the audience had to have an attitude or opinion to the dilemmas in the plot. You could not escape it. The many issues raised included loyalty, pride and racism.

Helen had researched a number of extreme situations in South Wales around which she centred her plot. Central to all these was the actual existence of a Ku Klux Klan sect in Maesteg, South Wales. She set the son of the family as a member of this sect, his sister was dating an Asian shopkeeper, the father was an outspoken ‘Alf Garnett’ type character who had opinions on everything, but no facts to back up any of his arguments, and the mother kept life ticking over at all costs.

Helen constructed an argument and set of circumstances that were ordinary and believable. People like this exist. We know them. We live next door to them. They go to our school, pub, club or women’s group. They are never us, but we (audience) always have an attitude towards their beliefs and behaviour.

The production won a Barclays Stage Partners award which enabled us to present the production at the Sherman and a short tour in Wales to Swansea, Milford Haven and Newtown. None of the other venues in Wales would take the risk of staging a new play for one night even though they said they would when the project was first planned. This indeed is a major debate for Wales in terms of the venue’s commitment to new Welsh theatre. What do the producing companies of Wales have to do to convince the
presenting houses, at all levels, to present their work? The venues that did present the piece were extremely pleased with the product. The production then transferred to the Hampstead Theatre in north London for a four week residency. Hampstead Theatre was created as a club theatre by a Welsh man James Roose Evans and dedicated to the presentation of new plays. Its international reputation and status is widely acknowledged. The opportunity to present a piece of Welsh theatre in London (a rare occurrence) was extremely exciting. The play opened well to thunderous applause on the first night, but the critics were divided. We don’t have this problem in Wales as we have no theatre critics as such. We of course recognise the culture of theatre critics and the power that they hold. At least 50% of the critics were not supportive of the production or the text. It is always a strange phenomenon when you get one critic who declares it as fantastic, ie the Sunday Times and another that hates it, ie the Evening Standard, saying “when the Taffs get going the going gets tough”. It is amazing that such philosophy, use of language, attitude and downright discrimination exists and is allowed to exist in a national newspaper. These attitudes were indeed to raise their heads again when Everything Must Go opened at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.

Flesh and Blood had been a hugely successful project in Wales. The Artistic Director and team at Hampstead had been 100% supportive of the text and the production. Many objectives had been achieved by the production. It was a unique partnership with Mike Peters (ex Alarm) who had written the music and published the CD of the songs used in the production (see portfolio). A major television programme was made about this production (see portfolio box one). It was a rare chance for a Welsh play to be presented in London by a Welsh theatre company and Welsh artists.
That said there was little celebration. The Arts Council of Wales when asked, refused to broker a meeting for us between Wales Tourist Board, Welsh Development Agency and themselves to see how we could celebrate and market the fact that two of our productions *Flesh and Blood* and *Everything Must Go* would play for a total of eight weeks in London on the grounds that they did not see it fit to favour any one of their clients. To us this was an opportunity missed and worked directly against the NAW manifesto to boost the confidence of the nation culturally at home, throughout Britain and internationally.

4 *Everything Must Go* by Patrick Jones

I had developed the text with Patrick over three years. We had workshopped it internally at the Sherman and finally presented the production to sell our audiences in 1999. EMG was a statement of the times – a rant – a comment on a nation experiencing change – an out loud angry voice that asked what role socialism would play in changing Wales.

Patrick Jones, a Blackwood poet, arrived on the Welsh theatre scene in 1999 with no previous theatrical experience. It was exciting, refreshing and challenging to welcome a new voice to the remarkably thin theatrical portfolio of Wales. It had been clear that like Frank Vickery in the neighbouring Welsh valley the audience had welcomed, supported and celebrated the work.

Patrick was a new theatrical voice and like many Welsh dramatists before him, Dannie Abse, Dylan Thomas, he came from a poetic world. Like many Welsh poets he had something to say, to comment upon, the state of humanity and indeed the state of the nation, and like many poets’ work, Patrick’s poems struck resounding points of recognition with other artists. Patrick’s brother is Nicky Wire, a member of the highly successful Welsh
rock band the Manic Street Preachers. In his introduction to Patrick’s anthology of poems and plays ‘Fuse’, Nicky identifies this point of recognition, or indeed another form of ‘familiar congregation’ (after Shade).

Back in 1990 we were playing Salisbury arts centre – supporting the Levellers – as always, in those days, we lasted about 15 minutes, alienating 1000 people and being bottled off. Travelling back in a cold transit van my brother Patrick, who had come along for moral support, began reciting – or better, ranting – a poem. Suddenly everything made sense – alienation felt comforting – the poem was the ‘eloquence in the screaming’ which still inspires me – the moment crystallised - froze and stayed with me ever since – Patrick had become a poet – we weren’t alone – he had realised himself – our voices had become one.

(James/Wire, 201 p9)

At its original presentation in 1999 EMG had played to full houses for three weeks and standing ovations nearly every night. There was a fantastic buzz around the theatre. The Manic Street Preachers had supported the project financially, artistically and emotionally. The press locally and nationally were extremely supportive in terms of pre-production copy and actual reviews. Over 60% of the audience had not attended the Sherman before and Patrick’s writing was genuinely celebrated and appreciated by the dominant sector of the audience. Indeed a new voice had arrived and there was an audience that wanted to listen.

Because of the 1999 success of EMG we made a decision to tour the piece in Wales and throughout Britain and give it a four week residency at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. Yet again the presenting theatres of Wales would not take the production. Consequently, it only played the Grand Theatre, Swansea and Blackwood Miners Institute. It did however tour in England and Ireland to Manchester, Belfast and Sheffield playing week
residencies before arriving in London, but no Aberystwyth, Bangor, Rhyl, Mold or Llandudno bookings.

We were interested to know whether this distinctly Welsh piece of theatre would be welcomed outside Wales. It was quite arrogantly Welsh and made no bones about it when talking to the audience. Generally the reviews and audience attendance were good throughout, except when it got to London. Yet again, within two months of what happened in Hampstead the London press were not at all supportive. Ironically, in 1999 many of the national newspapers had given the production fantastic reviews when seen in Cardiff, now, twelve months on the same national newspapers were totally unsupportive of the production. Ironically, it was an even stranger time to experience this when we had spent the last five years campaigning for independence and establishing a National Assembly for Wales. But there again, having been successful we still don’t have cultural power or anything near what Scotland achieved (or were granted).

Perhaps a stronger internal coherence within Wales is where our energies should be focused, alongside developing creative partnerships between the theatre companies of Wales and internationally.

**BBC Radio Wales, Sherman Plays Season**

In the year 2000 we again commissioned, developed and presented six new live broadcast radio plays from the Sherman. All had been written by Welsh writers. I directed two of the plays. For the 2000 season Alison Hindell, the producer of the season for BBC, and myself decided on a title of ‘New Laughs for a New Wales’. It had become important that the lunchtime plays were light and easily digestible for the audience in the theatre and for the radio listener.
5. **Pushy by Roger Williams**

Roger Williams had written for the Sherman Youth Theatre when he was a teenager. He had also written for the STC/HTC plays whilst he was still at university. During his twenties Roger had developed a positive relationship with BBC Radio Wales. *Pushy* was a light hearted view of the confidence of the Welsh nation. It took as its plot the idea that the National Assembly had employed a market research team from London to bring together the statistics on how confident people felt and what should be done to boost that confidence. The plot therefore followed two English/American market researchers as they travelled deep into the heartlands of west Wales to interview a woman, Myfanwy, on how confident she felt and what she needed to boost her confidence. The researchers were pushy and their investigations were about how the Welsh could be pushier. Although a light hearted comedy there was a lot of resonance in what Roger was saying. It was certainly bound up in my own personal experience with taking the company's work on national tours and into London. Our confidence needed boosting. It's a fine line that would actually define certain of our experiences in the year 2000 as racist. What was important within Roger's play was the fact that both the Welsh and the non-Welsh have a role to play in building the confidence of the Welsh people and perhaps a lot of confidence is already here in Wales, it just takes particular eyes and ears to observe it, rather than being measured against the needs of England.

6. **We Are What We Are by Arnold Evans**

Arnold Evans' play *We Are What We Are* is not about confidence but about ambition – another very important concept within Welsh identity. Set in the year 2000 a young, glamorous Miss Wales beauty queen on her way from north Wales to Cardiff is forced to stop her car amidst a torrential downpour in mid Wales and take
cover in a cave. Here she meets Owain Glyndwr who shares with her his visions for the Welsh nation and she tells him all about the Welsh Assembly – all that he predicted. The play had a wonderful potency of what is important, mystical and ordinary. A play that ensures that there is a smile on its audience’s face throughout, and gently nudges the conscience of the nation with deeper thought and optimism.

The function of these plays, and indeed seasons, is to be light hearted but to hint at greater thoughts. What is also important is the construction of half hour theatre, the one act play, a tradition which thrived in Wales in the second half of the 20th century. It’s a precise craft, a balanced science between plot intrigue and resolution leading to satisfaction and fulfilment, all of which need to be considered and achieved within 30 minutes. In the case of the radio plays, of course, this has to be done by language and effects with no visuals. One of the challenges and indeed joys of working in radio is the fact that you can be at the bottom of the sea one minute and on the moon in the next. These flights of fancy and imagination are a glorious world in which to invent drama. As a form, radio challenges the imagination of the listener, like TV and much contemporary theatre it is often caught in the domestic and reconstruction of everyday life, but at its best, radio like most expressive forms, is inventive and challenging within its form and content.

The joy for me to work professionally with Roger after he had been a writer in our youth theatre was fantastic. Alongside creating Helen Griffin’s play *Flesh and Blood*, it reinforced the importance of the *Generation Arises* project in 1994. It brought my work full circle and I yet again realised the value and worth of working in theatre for and by young people. All the threads had begun to be woven together in one contemporary tapestry celebrating the importance of my investment in young people and emerging
7. **All’s Fair by Frank Vickery**

In the Autumn of 2000 I programmed Frank Vickery’s second World War comedy *All’s Fair*. Originally commissioned by Spectacle Community Theatre in the Rhondda in the 1980s as a play to tour to community venues, it had recently been established as a set text by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) for the GCSE drama syllabus in Wales.

It’s a well constructed, nostalgic piece that looks at the implications of war on a small mining community. There are no surprises, it is fairly predictable and not over challenging. What is strong, as with much of Vickery’s writing, is the role of women in society and indeed within this one family. He has the knack of writing for women performers. Within the story the eldest daughter falls in love with .... yes, you’ve guessed it .... an American GI stationed in the valley. I made the important decision to cast this character with a black actor. Because the play hints at the immorality of falling in love with a stranger, who incidentally is also married, I wanted to raise the issue of a young white girl from the Rhondda valley falling in love with a black GI. All perfectly feasible in the late 1930s/early 40s in Britain. This casting helped heighten the debates for the year 2000. There was, every night, an audible response, gasp, intake of breath on the GI’s entrance.

In the early 90s Vickery gave up his full time job in a furniture factory in the Rhondda and began establishing himself as a professional writer. He has written extensively for stage, screen and radio and the majority of the plays have been published by
Samuel French. The amateur theatrical movement of Britain is constantly staging his plays.

He has often been likened to the Alan Ayckbourn of Wales. I personally feel he has more allegiance with Willy Russell and John Godber.

Ayckbourn had made his theatrical name by writing plays that commented on the lives of the middle classes of England predominantly outside of London. Willy Russell had always written about working class characters in his home town of Liverpool, whilst John Godber had placed the working class characters of his native Yorkshire centre stage in his dramas. Vickery has always written about working class characters in his native Rhondda Valleys. He wrote characters that he knew in his everyday life. Like Russell (Educating Rita, Shirley Valentine) he has an enormous skill of placing women’s lives centre stage. Vickery would explain this as being very dominated by his mother and having worked in an upholstery factory as a machinist with 300 women. He is responsive to the cultures of women and the role they play within family and such close working class communities as the Rhondda. He is able to put on stage a strong point of recognition for his audience. It is a plausible and recognisably honest voice from that community. Perhaps again this emphasises Shade’s point of ‘familiar congregations’.

Apart from the plays themselves the fantastic and phenomenal part of Vickery is his loyalty to his audience and consequently them to him. He has received no recognition from the writers or the professional theatre producers in general, but unlike most writers and theatre companies in Wales he packs large theatres wherever he goes.
Within the balance of the 2000 season I wanted to continue the Sherman’s ten year partnership with Vickery and his audience. I also wanted to make a GCSE set text available for young people. All’s Fair supplied both of these demands.

The play is built upon the human understanding of what is fair. It’s a phrase used liberally and often in society. ‘That’s not fair’. ‘Fair enough.’ ‘All’s fair in love and war.’ It is of course this last phrase that pertains most strongly to the play. Young girl falls in love with GI. The mother is dying of a terminal disease. The 12 year old daughter has to do housework to help. The eldest brother won’t propose to his girlfriend. In fact many things are just not fair in this play. Vickery finds endless ways to reinterpret the themes of ‘fairness’ throughout the play which is of course set at war time – a great time of unfairness for everyone.

Because Vickery gives his audience access to the inhumanity of the characters and situations he carefully ensures that his audience cares for his characters and those situations with empathy.

Watching a school party on the opening night, I was fascinated by their involvement. Almost to a person the boys empathised with the man, the girls with the women. All of them were shouting for more by the end.

It’s not a great play. It’s a well written, well constructed, adeptly observed piece. On reflection, had I been able to justify it financially, I should have performed the production in the Studio theatre. The main stage exposed the play into something it wasn’t. It would have been fantastic to have created a claustrophobic atmosphere of a small mining community in the Studio and one that everyone felt like they were sitting in the same parlour and that war was going on all around them.
Ironically of course Vickery wrote it for community venues and I had attempted to turn it into a main stage play. Oh to have the economic freedom to place the product in its rightful setting – the studio theatre, giving the audience access to the emotions close at hand, heightening the level of disturbance.

8. **Horrible Histories – Cracker Christmas by Terry Deary**

The main stage Christmas show at the Sherman is an important production. It plays for six weeks, twice daily and has a very high financial target. Within the ten years I had commissioned new adaptations of such classic stories as *The Snow Queen, Sleeping Beauty* and well known Roald Dahl titles such as *Matilda, BFG* and *The Twits*. *Horrible Histories – Crackers Christmas* was the first original play (apart from *The Secret Seven Save the World*) that I had commissioned.

It was of course based on the Horrible History formula of all the horrible and gory bits about Christmas in many cultures, but the main marketing strategy was based on the words Horrible Histories. It was still an enormous risk. Deary was not a playwright and the expectations of young audiences at Christmas is insurmountable particularly if you get it wrong.

Deary had constructed a simple adventure story based upon a villain who disguised himself as Father Christmas. His objective was to destroy Christmas for ever and do away with happiness. In order to do this he had to travel back through time to various Christmas events and attempt to wipe them out of history until he reaches the original Christmas in Bethlehem and attempts to destroy the origin.
Based on ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’ the adventure allowed us to create large dramatic set pieces of theatre around such stories as Dickens’ Christmas Carol, Christmas in war torn 1940s Britain, Christmas at the court of Henry VIII and of course the Nativity itself. Such an adventure demanding spectacle and invention alongside insuring that there was a modern/contemporary relevance for the audience.

The production was successful and we exceeded our box office target. The production also allowed us to develop our pioneering work of staging world premieres at Christmas for young people.

The Sherman has a distinctive role to play at Christmas in the city of Cardiff. The New Theatre presents a traditional pantomime whilst the Sherman offers an alternative for audiences. Our work also has a direct relevance to the school curriculum ensuring that teachers can justify their trip to the theatre and ensure that it can feed the classroom learning of young people.

To date this formula has proved successful and with Crackers Christmas we managed to maintain the audience and indeed increase it compared to certain previous years.

Much of the work within this season had proved to be successful. We had gained some new audiences and maintained our loyal supporters.

(All the scripts, programmes, press packs, personal notebooks, publicity and performance videos of these productions in 2000 can be found in portfolio box three.)
Conclusions on the Work in the Year 2000

On reflection 2000 had been an interesting and diverse season. I don’t think that I had created a major piece of ‘millennium work’ and I was quite pleased about that. I do believe that it had been a consistent season that had raised important questions for all our audiences. I had directed eight productions of which seven were new plays and four have subsequently been published. We had won the Barclays New Stages Award for our production *Flesh and Blood*. Two of the productions had transferred to London, a first for me personally, and we had toured throughout Wales and Britain. We had presented the world premiere of two of the Horrible History books. We also developed our relationship with the BBC Radio Wales by commissioning and presenting six new plays by Welsh/Wales based writers live from the Sherman on the BBC airwaves. Generally over the season over 55% of the audience who attended the Sherman Theatre came to see a Sherman Theatre Company production.

The usual frustrations had existed, namely the ongoing situation of under funding for the arts in Wales and standstill, non inflationary grants for the Sherman from both the ACW and CCC. There was still very little recognition of the importance of theatre for young audiences and a very low profile of the work in the press and media. Indeed the Western Mail had given very little priority to theatre and often could not afford to send a reviewer to see our productions. The level of advocacy by the ACW and the NAW was very low and Wales continually falls well behind England in terms of governmental spending awards for the arts. Sponsorship and private patronage had been extremely poor throughout the season. Apart from the Barclays New Stages award no one from the private sector had recognised the work for young audiences. It became clear that the private sector wanted big prestigious events, where they could wine and dine their clients. None of the commercial companies were investing in the next generation of theatre goers or emerging artists with any substantial patronage.
The 2000 season had, however, influenced and fuelled my ambitions for future work. I had, as a result of the work, become even more adamant that we should establish the Sherman as a National Centre for Young People’s Theatre in Wales and that the only way to do that was to create more work and tour it nationally and internationally.

The success of the new writing within the season made me reassess the function of the theatre. It was clear that people wanted to see us produce new plays, particularly with a relevance to Wales and our audiences’ lives. As a result of this we established a third experimental performance space at the Sherman called Venue 3. It only presented new plays, mostly in development, by Welsh and Wales based writers. As this work continued to develop it became increasingly important to appoint a writer in residence and a dramaturge that could foster, mentor and develop this important part of our work.

We had been extremely successful in getting our work published by companies such as Seren, Parthian Books, Samuel French and the Drama Association of Wales. (See portfolio) Because theatre is an ephemeral medium it is important that the work is published so that we can assess achievement, make the work more accessible internationally and throughout Wales and ensure that the future generations are able to see a development and growth historically in Welsh theatre.

The establishing of the youth theatre within the Sherman Theatre had been a priority for me in 1990. By 2000 I felt we had firmly established a policy and one of which we could be proud. With over 250 young people using the theatre weekly in twelve youth theatre groups we had begun to see the fruits of this policy beginning to influence the professional theatre movement. The consolidation and development of this work was still of great importance. As a result of this achievement it was identified that we should develop the work throughout the city with youth theatres in community venues and schools for those young people who were for various reasons unable to attend the Sherman Theatre. It also became a
priority to liaise with the local education authority and other funding bodies with the view to establishing a full time Education Office at the Sherman. A major development plan had also emerged through partnership with the University of Glamorgan and the National Association of Youth Theatres to establish an MA course in Youth Theatre Studies on a national level.

My major concern, on reflection of my own work, was that although we had achieved many exciting developments within the year, I was still concerned about the role of the artist. Much of the work had been text and writer based. This of course was extremely important and indeed necessary but I still felt that my work could have been more inventive.

This is partly due to the culture of compromise that the theatre had been forced into since the local government re-organisation. Although many of these plays had epic themes we were frequently forced to create small shows with small casts. When commissioning writers from 1997 onwards, I always had to ask them to restrict the number of actors they were creating and the number of locations they invented. It had always been my philosophy and practice when commissioning a writer to give them as few as possible restrictions. I wanted them to write the best play they had ever written. If that meant twenty actors and eight locations on Mars, Venus, the Brecon Beacons and a terraced house, so be it. Whatever the cost the importance was to fire their imagination and struggle with the possibilities of 'what if'. The compromise situation inflicted by financial restraint, now was beginning to take its toll with the artistic/on stage product. It would have been great to have the full professional cast of twenty-five actors for *Everything Must Go*. It would have been wonderful to have created a complete environment in the studio of a Rhondda terrace house where the audience felt like they were in the same room. It would have been inventive and dangerous but financially we were forced to present *All's Fair* on the main stage in order to achieve a higher box office return as possible.
Alongside being able to be more inventive on stage, we were unable to commission new plays for the next three years. It would have been exciting in the year 2000 to have been work-shopping with writers, actors and designers, new work that would have been programmed in the coming years that had an energy and a vitality that would ensure that audiences would have returned to the Sherman to partake of a contemporary theatrical vision and unique voice.

I had spent a lot of time working with musicians such as the Manic Street Preachers, Mike Peters, Paula Gardiner, Greg Palmer, James Dean Bradfield, Matthew Bailey, etc nearly all of the music, although newly written, had been recorded for the shows. I identified a new energy within myself to develop live performance music with actors/musicians. I had done a great deal of this work with Bruvvers Theatre Company in the 1970s and 80s and I had noticed that these skills were no longer reflected in my work on stage.

I believe it can be an exciting experience for young audiences to see live actors/musicians working on stage. It can add to the drama of the experience and inform the form of the theatre piece. To be able to see live on stage a group of artists with multi performance skills would, I believed (and still do), enrich the theatre production. This became one of the goals of my artistic invention for the next few years.

Another goal that was identified from this portfolio of work was to ensure that more practising theatre artists were invited to be part of the management structure of the theatre at both board and artistic advisory level. It is essential that artists have an input to the structure and role of the Sherman alongside politicians, bank managers, solicitors, property developers and government advisors from the ACW and CCC.

If the year 2000 taught me anything it was to raise the level of artistic invention. Interestingly, throughout the year many people had had opinion about the work. Some people felt that Patrick Jones was not a
playwright and should stick to his poetry, others wanted to publish his plays and numerous GCSE A level and drama students asked for copies of his texts. His plays had had standing ovations in Wales, Sheffield and Belfast, but the critics hammered him in London. The Vickery audience figures were not as high as when he wrote a new play, but more school groups saw the work because they were studying it for GCSE. Terry Deary had written his first professional plays, young people had loved them. There was a mixed reaction from adults. Both of his plays had played to large audience figures. Helen Griffin's *Flesh and Blood* was extremely well received by the Welsh audiences but again the London critics were not enamoured enough to help the box office figures.

All that being said, people were talking about the work. We had disturbed an opinion. Certain of the productions are still talked about either in anger, love or hate. When our audiences stop talking about the work, then we need to worry.

It was a year of highs and lows, but more highs than lows. New potential had been identified with a series of new writers and new audiences had arrived at the theatre (69% of the EMG audience had never visited the Sherman before). The time was ripe to develop these relationships and discover new ones. Invention must be the way forward whilst being wary of complacency. But if one philosophy must remain in my head it will be that of Roger Hill, chairman of the National Association of Youth Theatres, "What young people are saying today – the world will be living tomorrow."
Artistic Processes
Artistic Processes

- Introduction

- A Generation Arises
  A Sherman Theatre Summer School 1994

- Early Processes in the Rehearsal Room

- The Design Process (context)

- The Design Process on my Work in 2000

- The Importance of Design and Visual Language to Young Audiences
Introduction

Having dealt with philosophy and policy within this paper, I feel it is important to talk a little about my practice and working methods in the rehearsal room and with the artistic team that create the piece of theatre.

It is important that this overview spends some time recording some of my practice as a theatre maker. Without the theatre product there is little to administrate or executively direct. Theatre buildings exist to create and present theatre that has a relevance to and a dialogue with its community. However, when you run a theatre building there is so much executive/administrative work to be done to ensure that the building/organisation conforms to government legislation and is consequently 'fit for purpose' within its own working practice, that the artistic product often struggles for an equal status. My concern throughout the 1990s was to ensure that the creative artists always had a parity of status throughout the organisation of the theatre.

This section of my overview will describe three major areas of my artistic practice. The first concerns the commissioning and production process of A Generation Arises (1994), a large scale production with professional actors, writers and artists working in partnership with young and emerging artists. The second area exposes the process that I use in the first week of rehearsal on any show. The third and final area concerns my working relationship with the designer of a production and the importance of design and visual language in creating young people’s theatre.

This is not an exhaustive explanation, merely a glimpse of practice as an artist, which sits alongside the creation of a policy in a young people’s theatre.
In 1992 I decided to start creating a large piece of theatre with professional artists and young/emerging practitioners that would attempt to bring together the numerous strands of the Sherman’s artistic work. We had created work with professional actors and production teams; created youth theatre shows; commissioned and produced new plays from writers; run annual summer schools for up to 30 young people and created large scale Christmas shows on the main stage with professional actor and a chorus of some 30 young people.

I wanted to create a new piece of theatre that gave an equal status to the professional and emerging artists. I wanted to create a model that allowed young actors to work with professional actors, young writers to work with professional writers, young designers to work with professional designers and therefore ensure that young artists were not just learning new skills but were also able to put forward their own views, ideas and visions with parity to the adult workers. Their status would be as high as any adult professional artist working on the production. It would demand great courage, tolerance and understanding from both the young people and adults.

I had various experiences of working on large scale amateur/community projects in the past, but I had never experienced a working method/practice where there was an equal status between adult and young persons, professional and amateur. I believed, that if we were to progress the policy of the theatre as a creative institution that valued opinions and practice of young people alongside those of the adult professional, then I needed to create a working method and ideology that would allow an equal investment by all the participants. In order to achieve this I realised I needed to identify a subject that would allow everyone working on the project to have a strong opinion, alongside feeling that they cared about the content of the production. As I have
explained earlier, I strongly believe that content comes before form in the creation of new work. I know that not everyone works in this way, but for me personally I have to feel passionate about the subject area of a production before I can identify the form of the show.

In 1991 I had invited the visual artist, Peter Paul Piech who lived in South Wales, to stage an exhibition of his poster art at the Sherman. One of the pieces of art read:

There is no hope for Wales until A Generation Arises That knows its own past

It was a quotation from a speech given by the Welsh writer Saunders Lewis at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in the 1960s.
The quotation immediately caught my imagination and from it I started to develop the idea and structure for a production. Within the quote the words ‘a generation arises’ seemed to encapsulate what I was attempting to develop at the Sherman by empowering young emerging artists through participation in drama and theatre. Within the theatre there was a generation arising of new artists. As we empowered them to find their public voice within democratic society, the quotation challenged me to question how important the past could be to inform the present time. In truth, the quotation asked me to evaluate the function of history. Here was an opportunity to engage with a group of young and old, professional and non professional artists to discover whether history could inform our present thinking.

So often we as adults do not listen to young people. We dismiss their opinions and attitudes as immature and naïve. Yet at 16 young people can get married, have children and can join the armed forces to fight and die for their country. At 18 they have the democratic right to vote. Young people can play an active and positive role in citizenship. Within our media we predominantly see the negative side of young people and their culture, the drugs, theft, joyriding, drunkenness, bullying etc but we forget to recognise and celebrate their positive achievements. Their involvement in drama and youth theatre is a positive action to help them form opinion and shared identity which ultimately leads to empowerment and status. Because they are young and have relatively little history they automatically exist in the ‘now’ time. What matters for young people is the ‘now’ time and how that ‘now’ time will influence the future when they have recognised power.

The playwright Arthur Miller commented:

\[ \text{Theatre is the art of the present tense} \]

(Miller, 1956, Introduction)
That’s where young people exist, in the present tense. It is in the present tense that their ‘now’ existence matters. When young people are collectively involved in creating theatre that reflects their lives, opinions, and aspirations, they often create dangerous, relevant and exciting art. Involvement and participation are the vital ingredients, alongside empowerment to ensure that young people participating in theatre create art of powerful relevance not just for themselves and their peer groups, but to all people within society regardless of class, power, creed, race, religion, gender and sexuality.

I wanted to create a piece of theatre where all the participants were at the centre of the experience. This was not going to be a production where participants were told what to do, or be shown what to do, but everyone would be involved at every stage of the process and the production would evolve in a democratic process of shared agreement and understanding.

In the 1980s the Thatcher Government had excluded drama from the core subjects of the National Curriculum, consequently the drama teaching in state schools had been devalued and not received academic status. As we began to see drama being devalued as an academic subject in schools we also began to witness a growth in youth theatre work throughout Britain. The young people of Britain were voting with their feet. If they couldn’t pursue drama studies at schools then they would do so in their leisure time by joining their local youth theatre. It was in the early 1980s that, in England the National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT) was formed that brought together the growing Youth Theatre movement in solidarity to share ideology and campaign for financial investment from the Arts Council and local authorities. The NAYT is today a powerful body in England receiving relevant funding from the Arts Council of England.

By the 1990s the Youth Theatre Movement had grown enormously and at the Sherman we had a membership of nearly 300 young people and many more on waiting lists eager for a vacancy. There was no doubt that
young people had a hunger, thirst and commitment for drama and theatre and they would do their utmost to pursue their need, ambition and vision.

Annually we had run a 4/5 week summer school at the Sherman. Dozens of young people came and worked with professional arts practitioners to create a unique piece of theatre which was performed at the Sherman at the end of the summer of 1994. This was the equivalent to a professional rehearsal period.

As the idea for a show began to develop in my mind, certain principles began to influence my thinking, namely sharing, mentoring, empowerment, shared ownership and shared status. These principles seemed central to the process of creating this new piece of theatre because they reflected the positive actions and ideology of young people. I called the project A GENERATION ARISES.

In order for the process to be meaningful, I knew I had to allow a long development process. In all the project took two years to achieve from the initial idea to the fruition of performance.

I began by talking to a group of professional writers, Charles Way, Sion Eirian, Tim Rhys and Greg Cullen. Some of them worked for the Sherman Theatre, but all of them were established professional writers who had a commitment to young people and emerging artists.

I asked each of the writers to mentor and work with an emerging writer. They could either write with the emerging writer as a partnership, (but they had to ensure the emerging writer had the opportunity to write their own text) or they could develop their own script. What was important was that the emerging artists and the professional writers had a shared ideology as to what the play was going to say, and the structure of the drama. Sion Eirian chose to work in partnership with a young writer called Linda Quinn, and Greg Cullen, who also directed Mid Powys Youth Theatre chose to write with Kelly Evans, a young writer from Builth Wells.
who was also a member of his Youth Theatre. Two other emerging writers were invited to be part of the group, Helen Griffin, an actress from Swansea who wanted to develop her writing skills and Roger Williams from Carmarthen who was studying drama at Warwick University but had decided to specialise in writing for the theatre. We had a team of eight writers.

I then held a couple of initial workshops with the eight writers where we analysed the quotation and brainstormed the issues that the quotation evoked. History was obviously a strong theme, and at that time in Wales we were witnessing a growth within the cultural heritage/museum sector of heritage parks. These tended to be converted coal mining or woollen mill sites that had become derelict and were re-invented as walk-in, hands-on museums that celebrated the working class crafts of old Wales. The group of writers identified that a heritage park would be a strong holding form and setting for the production. It allowed them to write episodically and that for each their writings would represent an exhibit within the heritage museum that could be brought to life.

The development of the script/text took twelve months. I employed Alison Hindel, Head of BBC Radio Wales drama department to be the dramaturge on the project. Her role was to liaise with the writers, and work at developing, through workshops with myself a cohesive script that could be performed by a large company.

The result was an episodic adventure where two young people were locked into a Welsh heritage park museum overnight. On their journey through the exhibits they encountered various characters from Welsh history who in turn challenged them to question the nature and relevance of Welsh history and culture in their lives today.

Once we had a coherent script we could begin the next process of developing the production. Having appointed a designer, lighting designer, musical director, assistant director and technical team who
were all prepared, as professional artists to work in partnership with young emerging artists, we were able to start the process of auditioning.

We were not just auditioning for actors, but a whole range of theatre practitioners. Having cast the professional actors, who would be able to drive the central theme of the play, we then set up numerous audition workshops to find the rest of the company.

After auditions, a five week rehearsal process followed where professional actors (four) writers, designers, stage management directors and emerging artists from the same disciplines shared equal status, a production evolved that was stimulating, exciting, dangerous, and often complex. All aspects of the production, writing, acting, directing, lighting, design, stage management, production management, prop making, sound design, costume making, set construction and painting, marketing, script writing, proof reading, musical direction and music performance were shared equally resulting in a common ownership and responsibility throughout the entire process.

This was an exciting production. It brought together the Sherman’s philosophy and paraded it on stage to large audiences with a large cast all sharing a sense of pride, ownership and status.

The team of designers devised and built an environmental set in the studio theatre that the audience sat inside. This created a great inclusive feeling for the show. The performances took part all over the studio consequently there was not an ‘us and them’ feeling between the performers and audience. The themes chosen by the writers were quite extensive from a school visit to Bardsey Island, the role of women in the World Wars, the consequences of the collapse of the meat trades in Mid Wales, the role of language in Welsh schools to deer hunting and poaching in Margam Park, Port Talbot. Although all the themes were rooted in the history of Wales, all of them had a contemporary relevance to young people living in Wales in the 1990s. The very nature of the
changing episodes within the production demanded that the audience was constantly having to develop an opinion to the numerous themes that the writers and company explored. This ensured that the production was fast moving and energised, and because of the environmental setting it demanded the audience’s constant attention. It was an exciting crucible of ideas and opinions.

In an article I wrote for *Staging Wales*, an anthology of writing on Welsh theatre edited by Anna-Marie Taylor in 1997, I commented:

> After two exhausting years of germination and a four-week rehearsal period, ‘A Generation Arises’ burst onto the stage in September 1994. We had successfully combined the energies of the professional theatre community with the talents and energies of Wales’s young people in the 1990s.

> As a company we believe in ‘giving voice’ to the youth of Wales. A Generation Arises placed the voice of young people centre-stage, and raised questions for the future of Wales and its young people by making connections with youth culture throughout Europe.

> What we saw, what we heard, what we felt and what we experienced in this production was often dangerous, experimental, opinionated, frightening, informed and exciting.

> If we as artists cannot experiment with the ‘new’ then the generations of tomorrow will inherit a very ‘old’ world.

(Clar/Taylor, 1997, p 188)

The episodes written by Charles Way (*Working Out to See*) and Tim Rhys (*The Old Petrol Station*) were published in *Act One Wales*, the book I published in 1999 with Seren (see portfolio box two) and these scripts continue to be performed by young people to this day. The professional writers, Sion Eirian, Greg Cullen, Tym Rhys and Charles Way continue to be prolific writers in the Welsh theatre scene. Two of the emerging writers, Helen Griffin and Roger Williams now work as professional writers for stage, TV, film and radio in both the English and Welsh languages.

Needless to say the professional artists involved in the productions continue to work in the profession. Of the twenty young performers, eight
of them have become professional theatre practitioners. Dyfrig Morris
works in Welsh TV, the STC, Theatre Clwyd, Wales Theatre Company
Theatre Na Nog. Lucy Rivers works as an actor and musical director
working for the STC, Theatre Centre, Young Vic, Theatre Clwyd. James
Westaway sadly died in his mid twenties but worked professionally for
STC and Made in Wales Theatre Company etc. Eirlys Berlin having
trained at Mountview Theatre School, London, works professionally and
has been in Pobol y Cwm, the Welsh language TV soap series.
Jonathan Chappie continues to work in TV and theatre. Benjamin Harris
has performed with various companies including STC. Louise Ralf works
for the Arts Council and the Wales Millennium Centre and Ashley Bird
performs regularly with Sherman Nation and other fringe theatre groups
in Cardiff. There may be other young people who have made it as
professionals but these are the ones we know.

The fact that so many of the young performers and writers have become
professional arts practitioners reflects on the importance of a long term
and permanent commitment to young people and just as importantly, on
such a policy for the Sherman Theatre. Change doesn't happen
overnight. For those ten young people it took years for them to reach
their professional goal and there is always a generation behind them
waiting to make their mark on the world. (The following year using the
same model as A Generation Arises we staged the world premiere
production of the stage adaptation of Roald Dahl's Boy and of that
company eleven young people are now professional practitioners.) It is
impossible to assess the achievements of the Sherman's young people's
theatre policy in the short term. Or course there are short term goals and
productions are an achievement within themselves, but for a policy to
have a lasting impact on society, the commitment needs to be towards
permanency. Young people need the stability of knowing that the
institution will be there for a long time. Only then will they give the work
100% commitment.
Of course, not all young people working in the Youth Theatre movement end up as actors in their professional lives. But the skills gained in youth theatre do ensure a confidence in young people when they reach adulthood. I remember talking to one mother, whose child was in our youth theatre, but did not enter the theatre profession, who told me that the confidence her daughter had gained in youth theatre had ensured an eloquence in later life and particularly at the child’s grandmother’s funeral. The young woman chose to speak at that extremely emotional event and her mother, and indeed the young woman herself, recognised that her participation in youth theatre had given her the skills and confidence to speak publicly on such a sad occasion. Another mother told me how her son had not chosen to go to theatre school but had studied journalism. Today he is an in-vision journalist for HTV News Wales. She is adamant that his time in youth theatre gave him the grounding and confidence and use of language in a public arena. I’m sure there are many more incidents should the search be carried out. It clearly shows that youth theatre not only trains young people for the theatre, but gives them the broader skills for life and democratic citizenship.

This was an important project for the Sherman. It showed the world that we were serious about our commitment to young people and emerging artists. It proved that the Sherman Theatre could reinvent itself at any time and continue to create work with the professional and young people and emerging artist community of an extremely high standard.

So often local authorities and arts funding bodies withdraw funding from schemes before they have had a chance to embed themselves within the complex structures of a community. Constancy breeds trust and commitment and I believe that these two qualities are the basis of strong citizenship.

A Generation Arises, had succeeded for me to ensure that young people were at the heart of our policy. They were not an add-on commodity that
gave the theatre community credibility, but a genuine included voice towards creating a vital and relevant theatre in Wales.

The scripts and notebooks pertaining to *A Generation Arises* can be found in portfolio box two.
Early Processes in the Rehearsal Room

The first day of rehearsal on any given project may be the 'first day' for the actors and stage management, but it is certainly not so for the director, writer and design team.

For months prior to the rehearsal period, there will have been a deep investigative and visioning process that will have evolved between the production team. Over the months a shared language will have evolved that will have enabled the script to have been developed ready for the rehearsal process and a design concept realised into a model box format. Consequently, in the first few days of rehearsal it is important that the actors begin to understand where the script came from and how the design concept evolved.

In this section of my paper, I will describe some of the techniques I use with actors on a new production in the first week of rehearsals. The techniques are used to explore the text and the characters, therefore they are applicable to any new production I am working on. After week one, the rehearsals become more specific to the production.

Day One

I have always felt that it is important to bring the entire company together on the first morning of a new production. This includes actors, writers, designers, musical directors, voice coach, choreographer, stage management, production manager, marketing team, finance team, administration, technical team, wardrobe department, box office team, the youth and education department, literally everyone. I call this the 'meet and greet'. Sitting in a circle we introduce ourselves and explain our role in the building and on this particular production. I then outline the timetable for the rehearsal period. I welcome anyone to observe the rehearsal period over the next, usually four weeks. Next I explain why I chose the play and what my vision is of the proposed production. I also attempt to make it clear how it fits into the overall season of the company.
and its relevance to the proposed target audience. I invite questions and observations. I then invite anyone who can to stay for the set/model presentation and read through of the script. At this point many of the staff have to leave in order to carry on with their daily jobs leaving the remaining staff to listen to the set presentation.

By this point in any production everyone has read the script, so in order to give the text a physical context I ask the designer to give a presentation of the set and costumes.

For all productions a scale model of the actual set is created. Everything, in terms of scenery, that will appear on stage is represented in the scale model box. The designer and myself first talk about the influences on our thinking and what process we went through to arrive at the model box. This will include a summary of our discussions and aims, other artists / photographers / sculptors etc work that influenced us. We both make note/sketchbooks available that include the visual influences. The designer then takes the company through all the set changes within the model box explaining how and why these happen. This process helps the actors understand the environment in which they will create the play; it helps the stage management and technical team understand their role and begin to project their function within the production and for everyone else it allows a clear visualisation, in miniature, of what the final production will look like. There is then a presentation of the costume drawings of each of the characters. There follows an open discussion on the set and costumes with the entire company.

Having completed the presentation I now set up the first (public) reading of the play. If it is a new play I explain why the play was commissioned and the process pertaining to how the script evolved from draft one to this rehearsal draft. I will then invite the writer to talk about their script and outline their objectives when writing the play.
I then set up the read-through. Sitting in a circle I ensure that the actors/readers are evenly distributed around the circle. I ask the actors to read the play with a performance energy and to help achieve this I ask them to read/perform the play as if they are recording a radio play and envisage that there is a microphone in the centre of the circle. This technique ensures that there is a sense of occasion to the read through, and demands a performance energy and liveliness to the actors' reading. Where necessary I read in the stage directions. When everyone is ready the reading takes place, and I encourage the listeners to respond as an audience and make notes concerning any clarification that might be needed.

After the read through there is a brief discussion within the room and any points of clarification are made by myself or the writer. This process of read through and discussion can take about two hours or more.

I then send the actors to the wardrobe department to be measured for costumes. I place a large sheet of paper on the floor and invite everyone else left in the room to write down their response to the play and one image from the play that was strong for them. Many non-performers have difficulty in expressing their views vocally in a public arena and this technique allows everyone to have an impact and begin the process of a shared voice from a large community. I then break for lunch.

After lunch it is usually only the director, musical director, actors, writer (where applicable) and deputy stage manager who will now form the nucleus of the rehearsal room process.

During the lunch break I will have covered one complete wall with blank paper. I now pursue a brainstorming exercise with the company asking them to shout out what they think the play is about and I write the words on the wall. There could be dozens of words and often discussion begins to emerge regarding certain words. This is a long process and it is important that it is inclusive and supportive. When we believe we have
exhausted the possibilities I ask everyone to study the brainstorm and choose the three main words within the brainstorm that sum up the play for them. I ask each individual to tell me their chosen words and I put a ring around those words on the brainstorm sheet. Gradually we begin to see certain words emerging as the overall themes as our understanding of the text. A debate happens at this point, which is often lively and people begin to ask questions and challenge each other pertaining to words on the brainstorm and our perception of the text. We also now begin to take these words and discuss the relevance of such words/themes to the lives and possible opinions/understanding of our target audience. This process can take a long time and is no way exhaustive.

So within a very short time, we are beginning to discuss the deep issues and themes pertaining to the play. We are also beginning to observe the issues that we as a company are beginning to prioritise within our perception of the play. A shared language is beginning to emerge.

Next I move away from the brainstorm wall and ask the company to face another wall of blank paper. This time I ask each of them to think of the strong emotional moments in the play. These could be funny, sad, frightening etc. What I am looking for is a level of emotional disturbance that our company observe in the play. I write their responses on the wall. We discuss all the moments that have been identified in detail and often opinions differ and arguments evolve. The company is beginning to care about and own the text. I then ask them to rate each moment written on the wall on a scale 1 – 5 with first being the greatest. Here I am beginning to evolve a shared understanding of the strongest emotional and disturbing moments for the audience. I then place the moments in order with all the ‘ones’ at the bottom and the ‘fives’ at the top and the various others in between. A further discussion will happen. I then explain that this will create a short-hand language for us all during the rehearsal process. When we get to any given emotional moment we will all know that its worth is high or low within the overall journey of the
production. I make it very clear that as this is only day one, that many of these could change in terms of their worth, but we are beginning to understand an emotional balance within the play. I believe this process to be important because everyone involved with this production, should take responsibility for the complete production. We are at this stage beginning to build an ensemble of artists who respect each other's opinions and talents and together we will create the production. We are all important spokes in one wheel. A shared respect, should at this stage have begun to evolve for each other, the process, the text and the target audience.

Finally at the end of day one I give everyone a sheet of paper and I ask them to think of themselves as a target audience member. On the paper I ask them to complete the sentence, "I've just been to the Sherman Theatre and I've seen a play about . . . ." I ask the company to be as precise as they possibly can. We read each other's sentences back to each other, comment about them and put the papers on the wall. I sum up the day, and that completes day one of rehearsal. It has been important too for me to create a safe environment within the rehearsal room that allows all the company to participate equally. Everything that anyone says or has written down has value and worth. No one has failed and everyone has had an input to the collective voice. This shared atmosphere is the culture I want to develop within the production. A culture of responsibility, caring and shared respect. By using these techniques it also introduces the company to me as a director and how I think and work. I want them to know that I prefer to work practically, and that by using these techniques my opinion is only one part of the production. I have invited the company to participate and introduced them to my thinking through practical means. I want the rehearsal period to be inclusive and not prescriptive. I don't tell people what to do and think, but by including them in the shared debate I can ensure that a language evolves through the production that pertains to the brainstorm words and emotional objectives that have been identified collectively by the company. Of course they can change. They will change as our
deeper understanding of the play evolves, but for now we are all ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’. We are all in the same play.

**Day Two**

Having been extremely word and chairbound in day one it is important that we begin to move the play around the rehearsal room and inhabit the space which will be the company’s home for the next three weeks.

After a good physical and vocal warm up (the tools of our trade) I ask each of the actors to use the other actors in the room and without words build a physical picture with bodies of one moment in the play that was important to them. It is important that no words are used but that the actor creating the picture explores all possibilities of the physical shape of the other actors in the picture. Their body shape; sitting; standing; relationship to each other; their facial expression; gesture; status within the picture and overall emotion and attitude. When the picture is compete the rest of the company have to analyse the picture and identify the moment within the text using words. The detail in this process is important. We begin next to create a physical language for the play, understanding that the pictures we create on stage have as strong an impact on the audience as the words in the text. We are looking to discover a complementary physical language that will enhance the text and create strong images on stage. Each actor creates their picture, and after a few hours we begin to inhabit a physical understanding of the play, that will eventually lead to how we stage each scene and isolate moments within the scenes with both a physical and textual relevance.

At the end of this process we begin to draw parallels between the physical moments and the emotional moments as identified in day one.

The second session on day two is concerned with ‘unit-ing’ the complete text. As a company we start reading the text again with an objective to identify the emotional journey in the play. As we read the play anyone can stop the reading if they think the emotional objective, or indeed the
narrative, has changed. Obviously some of this work has been achieved by the writer by constructing the play through a series of scenes. This process of 'unit-ing', however, allows the company to de-construct the play and observe where objectives change within a scene alongside the structure of the scenes. When an emotional change is agreed by everyone, this section is called a unit and collectively we identify a title for this unit. By the end of the process, the play could well have over 100 units. We begin to observe, now a more detailed structure of the play. We are beginning to identify the shape of the emotional journey that the audience will be taken along. Also, because there is an emotional objective for each unit, which is generic, each actor now has to discover what their character's function is in achieving their objective within each unit. Because this is a shared process with the entire company, it allows everyone concerned with the production, to understand all the characters' functions within the narrative of the play. Identifying personal character objectives will happen later in week one.

At the end of day two, I often ask the company to collectively agree on three pivotal moments in the play and create the still picture of each moment with their bodies. We then compare these moments to those identified at the beginning of the day and try and analyse how our thinking and perception has changed and developed throughout the day.

By the end of day two we will have worked through the text for a second time and hopefully the physical approach of day two, will have complimented the word approach on day one. Together these approaches should have informed a greater understanding of the play which should manifest itself in the deconstruction process of uniting.

Day Three
I have consciously made a decision not to talk about characters in days one and two. There is always a danger that actors' initial response to a play is through the eyes and emotions of the character they are going to play. Of course these will be important, but a greater understanding of
the entire play needs to be shared and owned by the entire company before dealing with the personal domains of individual characters. As a result of this thinking I devote the entire day three to character work.

After an extensive physical and vocal warm up, I cover the floor of the rehearsal area with blank paper. I ask each actor to lie on the floor, and get a fellow actor to draw round them with a black felt pen. Each actor is then instructed to think of the personal qualities and facts that constitute their character. I ask the actor to draw a line down the centre of the silhouette and explain that one side of the body outline represents the negative qualities of the character and the other the positive. I now ask the actors to fill in the outline with the personal qualities and facts pertaining to their character. As they write these qualities and facts on the outline, I ask them to carefully consider where they should be written. Firstly are they a negative or positive characteristic and secondly where on the outline the characteristic lies, ie nearest the head, the heart, the crutch, the stomach, the feet etc. This allows a physicalisation of facts and emotions and will eventually inform the actors’ process of constructing the character physically on stage.

This is a long process, and a very thorough one. Time needs to be given to each actor to crawl inside their own character and ensure that as much information as possible is exploded on to the silhouette. This will become a physical notebook for the actor throughout the rehearsal process.

When everyone has completed the task, we all read each other’s physical notebooks and one by one, we then as a company discuss each other’s charts. After each character is discussed in detail, the actor who will create the character has the opportunity to add new information to the silhouette that they have gained through the discussions and the other actors’ perceptions of the character.

This process will take at least half a day. By the end of the morning of day three, when the silhouettes of each character are put on the walls,
the rehearsal room begins to take on a new life of brainstorm charts, emotional objectives scales and character studies that are the common language of the ensemble of artists.

The second half of day three is concerned with character development through physicalisation and intellectual realisation. To begin the session, I ask each of the actors to find their own space and sit in it, either on the floor or on a chair in a neutral position that reflects the physicality of their character. Through a series of instructions, I ask them to physically experiment with how their character, stands up, sits down, walks around the room, lies down, meets other people. I ask them to develop how they walk. What is their body rhythm. What is the shape of their body. Where is the centre of their character physically. What are the strongest parts of their body. Where are they physically vulnerable. What part of their body they lead with when they work. After a good time of personal experimenting and decision making we begin to put the character in a public arena.

One by one, each actor physically demonstrates their character to the rest of the ensemble who comment on what they are observing. This should be a positive and constructive experience. At the end of each demonstration each actor has the opportunity to put any new information they have discovered about their character on the silhouette notebook.

The final session of day three is concerned with role playing and hot seating. I ask each actor to become their character and they sit in front of the ensemble. The company then hot seat the character by asking them as many questions as possible about their life, background, attitudes and opinions. The actor has to stay in role as character throughout. All the characters in the play are hot seated. At the end of the process, again the actors have the opportunity to update their living notebooks with any new knowledge they have gained through the process.
By the end of day three the company should have the beginnings of an understanding of the plot, narrative and structure of the text alongside the characters that inhabit the play. Again the concept of a shared ownership of plot and characters is important, not just as ownership but of understanding.

**Day Four**

It is important that I change the rhythms of the rehearsal room constantly. At this stage I don’t want us to become comfortable through familiarity. I want us to keep finding new ways of experimentation and exploration as a team. Language has played an integral part in the company’s development at this stage. Essentially this has been achieved through words and physicalisation. I now want to think laterally and introduce a new kind of language and thinking into the process.

Again I have covered the floor with blank paper and again given each actor a selection of drawing and painting equipment. There is always a look of fear on some actors’ faces and usually someone explains “I can’t draw”. This is a normal reaction. So many people are told at school that they can’t draw, which inhibits them for the rest of their lives. I assure everyone that there is no ‘wrong way’ to do the following exercises. Everything that they do will be ‘right’ and not judged.

I ask the actors to think about the whole play. Then using whatever drawing, painting or collage materials they want, I ask each of them to:

1. Draw the shape of the play.
2. Draw the line of the play.
3. Draw the form of the play.
4. Draw the colour of the play.
5. Draw the texture of the play.

I ask them to work on their own and instinctively. Don’t think too hard or long about what they are going to draw, all the time reminding them that
whatever they draw is right. This exercise can be hard for some people, it can also be liberating. It is about the invention of a new language. It is a way of laterally thinking about the play (the technique can also be used to analyse characters and I often use it later in the rehearsal process).

When everyone has completed the tasks we then share back what we have drawn and, where necessary why we have drawn it that way. We also comment on each other's work in a positive way. This extended exercise leads to new language being created and shared in the rehearsal room. It is not necessarily about words, it is about pictures that represent feelings, emotions, understandings and perceptions.

Almost every time that I have used this technique the participants have been frightened by it. By the end of the exercise they have been invigorated and new language has been realised into the rehearsal room and a greater understanding of the play has been shared through images. This exercise often helps the actors make a greater connection with the designer's realisation of the text in their model box. I am always excited by these developments and new thoughts. It is part of the excitement and danger of the rehearsal process that leads us closer and deeper towards a richer realisation of the text.

At the end of this session the drawings are put on the wall and again a new physicalisation of discovered and shared language has a permanency in the rehearsal room environment.

These living notebooks are there as a constant reminder throughout the rehearsal process and if, or rather when, we get stuck in the play's development, these sheets of exploratory language and ideas are there to help us liberate every possible moment when creating the play.

The second half of day four is again a change. This second section connects with day five of the process as the activity takes a long time to explore.
The Second Half of Day Four and Day Five

We now begin to put the text 'on its feet' and work on it in a way that is possibly more recognisable as a rehearsal process. Having worked in broad strokes on the issues and structure of the play we now start from the top of the play, with each actor playing their own character, and begin to plot the physical and emotional construction of the play in the given environment.

For this to happen I have to explain to the company the 'mark-ups' in the room. Using coloured tapes, the stage management will have created, to scale, a physical drawing of the set on the floor of the rehearsal room. The mark up will tell the actors where the walls, doors, stairs, steps etc are in relation to the audience. This allows us to explore the actual playing areas within the set.

Starting from the top of the play we now begin to stage the physicalisation of the text. When an actor comes in; where they move in the space and when they exit. It is up to the actor to discover this process. They will move instinctively in response to the words and the emotions with any given scene. To further explore this process, I ask the actors to observe two processes. The first is the unifying we discovered earlier in the rehearsal process, the second is the character's personal objectives relevant to the scenes and identified units.

Every character has a series of objectives. What does your character want to achieve emotionally within the scene? Why do they come on? How do they achieve their objective within the scene, and what is their achievement and status as they exit the scene? This will also inform their next entrance and their new objective. So we begin to discover what a character wants in a number of ways. These can be emotional, functional and practical. Often these objectives will drive the emotional engine of the drama of each scene and ultimately the shape of the play.
This is a very long process, but hopefully by the end of day five all the company will have a physical blocking of how the play works on stage, and a beginning of an understanding of the characters emotional objectives within the drama. The work that was developed in days one, two, three and four should inform the process. Also, because the company has been working as an ensemble with shared understanding and responsibility throughout the week the actors can begin to understand and respect each other's personal objectives within each scene and the overall shape of the play.

At the end of this process on day five, I again ask the actors to return to all the charts on the wall and ask them to add any new information or knowledge that they have acquired through the blocking and personal emotional objectives technique. There is also an opportunity here to change the wall charts, as there is every possibility that the assumptions made earlier in the week were wrong.

Day Six
A lot will have been achieved in this first week. Because the work is fairly intense, it is important to ensure that this last session has been a great deal of fun and a sense of personal achievement. In order to do this, I call this the 'weekly rep' session. Many years ago, groups of professional actors rehearsed a play in one week, and presented it to an audience in week two in the evenings, whilst they rehearsed the second play in week two during the day and performed it in week three. These were seasons of say, 15 weeks repertory theatre using the same actors. The company rehearsed and performed 14 plays in 15 weeks. It was a real performers' medium. This model of working has now practically vanished in Britain.

In order to keep the company's energy high at the end of week one, I ask them, with scripts in hand, to perform the complete play (similar to the radio exercise I use in the read-through on day one). They now have a little knowledge of the shape of the play, the emotional units, the characters' objectives and the physical on stage geography. This
exercise allows the actors to reconstruct the play they have dissected throughout week one. It allows them to go home for the weekend with a coherent understanding of the whole play. It is a fun exercise done in the knowledge that you still have another two and a half weeks rehearsal before performing in front of an audience. This process also helps the actors to learn their lines. If the first week’s rehearsal has gone well then the actors begin to learn the deeper meanings of the text. Their understanding is richer and their shared understanding of the many aspects of the production will inform their personal motivation and hopefully make their lines easier to remember.

This brief explanation of the first week of any given rehearsal period is an exciting process of bonding and creating a family. The same objective exists in running a theatre. We are all one family that has shared values and objectives. I don’t change who I am when I enter the rehearsal room. It is important that the staff of the theatre are included in this process which is why I operate an ‘open’ rehearsal process allowing anyone in the ‘extended family’ to observe rehearsals and share ideologies. This practice ensures a level of communication throughout the organisation and cements a commitment to the target audience throughout the theatre.
The Design Process (context)

Within my own working practice, on all our productions, one main feature remains dominant: my relationship with the designer.

Certain patterns of practice have emerged in my work in the last thirty years. Having failed the 11 plus exam, most of my secondary education happened at Brecon Secondary Modern Technical School in the 1960s. This included my CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education) examinations and my O (Ordinary) Level examinations. To study for A (Advanced) level examinations, I had to transfer to Brecon Boys Grammar School. Up until this point in my life I had existed in a mixed gender education environment. I had never experienced an all male environment.

At the Brecon Boys Grammar School I sat/studied two A Levels – Art and English. I had been obsessed with the art course and had spent the complete two years in the art room, painting. I had very rarely attended English classes. The English teaching had been solely concerned with reading the novel, play, poem etc around the classroom by young people (my fellow classmates) extremely badly. At the end of reading the said text the English teacher would read out his notes which we all had to copy down into our exercise books word for word and at the end of the lesson he would set an essay title for our homework. At no time had I been engaged, excited or indeed remotely interested in the content of his lessons. To this day I believe that is because he was not interested (any more) in his lessons and he was not interested in us as a class. It could have been anyone sat in front of him. Indeed nothing changed for him year on year. In the art room life was totally different. It was about you as a person. The teacher wanted to develop you the artist. All of us had different skills, objectives and talents. The teacher ensured that each of us was taught to the absolute maximum of our individual potential, alongside ensuring that the complete curriculum was taught.
It was not until later in life, after working with the two educational drama specialists, Gavin Bolton (Durham University) and Dorothy Heathcote (Newcastle-upon-Tyne University) that I realised why I had been more successful at art than English. Basically the art teacher had placed me at the centre of my own learning. I was not one of a mass that was just presented new knowledge. No, I was invited into the lesson to discover alongside the teacher and other classmates new knowledge and share and appraise our new found facts. Often the new knowledge was appraised in the context of a contemporary world, the world in which I lived. Bolton and Heathcoate of course had used such techniques to invent the modern (1970s) drama curriculum in education and it was alongside such development that the TIE movement had been invented.

Obviously at the time, 1969 as I studied for my A Level examination, I had no idea what was going on. I did know however that I did not want to be in the English class, even though I loved plays, poetry and novels and indeed worked with them constantly in my leisure world through amateur drama and Eisteddfods practically every night of the week and all weekends. But in the art room I was an artist. I was valued, I was challenged, I had to create, I had to invent. I balanced success against failure. I developed opinion. I observed artistic taste, I experienced envy, frustration, jealousy and hideous longing. But I was never allowed to be alone but to share all of my experiences and create art all day every day. Consequently there was no need for homework. I had to draw, paint, sketch, make, design 24 hours a day.

As a teenager I remember reading William Wordsworth's poem, *The Tables Turned*.

Up! Up! My Friend and quit your books;  
Or surely you'll grow double:  
Up! Up! My Friend, and clear your looks;  
Why all this toil and trouble?  

(Wordsworth, 1942, p 274)
These words ran through my head as a teenager. It was a time when everyone told me to read more if I was going to succeed in the world. Although I enjoyed reading I wanted more than words. I wanted the influence of all art forms, poetry, sculpture, theatre, painting, photography etc etc. I need involvement in as many artistic expressions as possible. This need has remained with me throughout my life. When I hit a brick wall in life it is usually to paintings that I turn for solace and liberation of thought. Artists such as Ceri Richards, Andy Goldsworthy, Matisse, Albert Irvine, Richard Long, Rachel Whiteread, Meg Stevens, Kyffin Williams, Magritte, Derrick Jarman, Terry Frost, Patrick Heron, David Hockney, Anthony Gormley and Paula Rego have all proved vital to me in the liberation of my artistic expression. Their paintings and sculptures have provided me with a non verbal starting point to develop a relationship with ideas and to construct a language of theatrical expression.

Alongside the work of these artists, environments have proved liberating to me, particularly as starting points for creativity. Nature is the most treasured possession that I have. From it I can develop thought, opinion and ideology. It influences me in a way that has no boundaries but endless opportunities and possibilities. Such environments as Castell Coch in Cardiff, the Brecon Beacons in Powys, Llangorse Lake in the Usk Valley in Powys, Las Ramblas in Barcelona, the town square in Krakov, Poland, the sea’s edge in Vancouver, Canada and the west Wales coastline have all helped lead me to the understanding of a particular play text in a rich way. These images and experiences have influenced the designs on numerous shows and helped create a physical, intellectual and emotional landscape in which I have been able to create a piece of theatre.

Throughout a production process, my note/sketch books are extremely important to me. In them I brainstorm objectives, draw pictures, collage images from painters and the environment that have relevance to my vision of the production, doodle and record all my random thoughts.
They become the bible of my production. Through them I create a shared language and dialogue with the designer and all the other artists working on the production.

(For examples see portfolio box two)

Of course books, words and writing, particularly poetry have played their part in my understanding and interpretation of theatre texts but it is undoubtedly painting, sculpture and nature that have ensured that I have found the words in order to express myself in the first instance. They have inspired and led me towards words. It is often these worlds that I return to seek solace and more often to find liberation into greater thought and understanding. They re-charge me. They energise me. They stimulate me. They inspire me. They disturb me. Only when I have experienced this world am I ready to create a piece of theatre. By its nature, theatre is a collective and communal act. It demands rigorous debate in the rehearsal process and throughout the production process. It is vital that a shared language is created and owned by all the artists. In order to enter this world, I support my thoughts, ideas and aspirations with the stimulus of paintings, sculptures and nature. Their language is endless. The language of theatre is finite within its present tense, but hopefully, infinite in the way it touches and disturbs society. So...

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

(Wordsworth, 1842, p 274)

At the end of my schooling I had achieved an A grade in Art at A Level and an F in English. (I didn't know for two days that F meant fail, I assumed it was a low grade, but at least I'd passed!) Throughout these formative years I had been adamant that I was going to attend drama school. Precociously I had sent for the prospectus for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), London, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London and the Central School of Speech and Drama,
London at the age of 11. I knew what I wanted to be even though the youth careers advisor had asked me to consider the idea of the army! A strange and demented woman who looks at a young boy in 1969 wearing green flared trousers, love beads, knee high boots, shoulder length hair, chiffon scarves and a white Afghan floor length coat and suggests Her Majesty's Forces. Presumably she was of the persuasion that the army would straighten me out!

So in the early 1970s, it was goodbye to art and hello to a fulltime daily curriculum of drama at theatre school. I do not regret the decision at all. I have continued to use my art skills in conjunction with theatre at every possible moment.

The influence of that two year A Level art course and indeed the complete secondary art teaching has remained dominant in my thinking and influenced my practise quite considerably. I often use art based exercises in the rehearsal room encouraging actors to find means of expression within the drama using the basic elements of art, line form, colour, shape and texture. I, at times, will ask actors to draw the shape of a scene or the line of the emotion or the texture of the relationship. Such lateral thinking in the rehearsal room can liberate new and exciting thoughts and endless possibilities for dramatic interpretation. The rehearsal room is about invention at all levels. Consequently quite often at the end of the rehearsal period my rehearsal room is completely covered with paintings, drawings, charts, brainstorming sheets, etc etc. So often there is an enormous burden on the actor to carry everything in their mind and physical persona, there is no way that you can avoid this in theatre but the walls of the rehearsal room can be a living notebook of ideas and influences – a sort of bible of resources peculiar to the production that the actor can refer to physically on a daily basis. A valuable living resource.

The influence of art and painters/sculptors is very dominant in the work that I pursue with the designer of the production I am working on. For
every production I have directed there will be one artist who has influenced the design. This can be observed in all my notebooks. (see portfolio) I spend a lot of time analysing what the play is about. I brainstorm, read relevant research and draw ideas. At this point I usually consult my books about artists and visit various art galleries, think and open my mind to be responsive to influences relevant to the identified content of the play. For instance in the year 2000 my production of EMG was influenced by Anthony Gormley’s sculpture Critical Mass; Flesh and Blood by Swansea painter Jack Jones; All’s Fair by Cornelia Parker’s Cold Dark Matter – an Exploded View of 1991 and the paintings of Patrick Heron influenced the design for Unprotected Sex.
The Design Process on my Work in the Year 2000

To explore this a little further I want to expand on the design process of All’s Fair, Flesh and Blood and Everything Must Go and explain how works of art influenced lighting, scenery and movement in these productions.

Frank Vickery’s play All’s Fair is set in the Rhondda Valley of South Wales during the Second World War. South Wales had been a large target for the enemy as much of the economy of Britain relied on the industries of South Wales. There was heavy bombing in South Wales predominantly in Swansea, where the complete heart of the city had been devastated. Devastation became a strong theme within my production. I was interested in how people survived and carried on through devastation. When working on the design with Jane Linz Roberts the designer of the show we decided to spend time talking about these ideas. The next day I went to Tate Modern in London. I came across a room that housed only one sculpture, Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View by sculptor Cornelia Parker. She had taken a garden shed with all its contents and asked the British Army to blow it up – which they had done. Parker then collected all and every part of the debris and reconstructed the moment of explosion by suspending all the objects around one single light bulb. The effects his had was to look at the shattering of a moment through suspension and shadow. Having experienced the sculpture for a good four hours at the Tate, I spent time talking to the designer who indeed then spent time with the sculpture herself.

The play is set in a terrace house in the Rhondda in 1930/40. Therefore we are talking about two-up two-down with a lean-to scullery, no bathroom, but a tin bath hung in the back yard and a pantry under the stairs.
There were so many facets of the sculpture that influenced the actual final stage set. For instance when the single bulb was switched on in the pantry under the stairs on the set the reflections resembled the shattering of the sculpture. Apart from an emotional response to the sculpture being similar to the emotional life of the play, we began to see how the piece of art could influence both the set and the lighting. Consequently this sculpture became a common and shared language throughout the complete process of staging the play. The colours, shadows, use of light, the single light bulb, the darkness.

Light of course was dominant to survival or at night lack of light. "Put that light out" (last line of the play). Parker's sculpture became the dominant image for my discussion with the designer and lighting designer.
For the production of EMG the designers (again Jane Linz Roberts set and costume and Ceri James lighting) and I again had a central image. I had been very inspired artistically, intellectually and spiritually by a visit to the Royal Academy of Art in London to see the sculptor Anthony Gormley's installation, Critical Mass.

Critical Mass  
Anthony Gormley 1998
A vast selection of life size body metal casts in various poses. It influenced the movement sequence in the opening speech of EMG which I choreographed with 15 actors responding to the images from the speech.

(See EMG video in portfolio box three)

See, we didn’t start this you know; we we we didn’t start this fucking war we call lived today ok ok we didn’t start it we we jus grew up amongst it all, didn’t have a choice really did we did we? Thought you sorted it out after the war didn’t you, say, didn’t the fuck you? Fucking e- rad-i-cate funding WANT fucking DISEASE bastard IGNORANCE fucking SQUALOR and IDLENESS say didn’t you – sort the working class out you said – well take a fucking look take a fucking look around you.

We are the generation with no name the x y z e generation go on go on label us go on go on – we are the them the them the losing the don’t care know nothing have everything generation we are the frightened generation the the anything generation come – come on down come on down – welcome welcome to the pain welcome to the beauty welcome to YOUR monster 2000 welcome to the piss stained rain cleansed bus tops and crack alleys of Wales today your Wales your fucking Wales – go on go on – come on dome on down your lovely (fake welsh accent) wales – lovely innit – oh aye – lovely – how green in my valley how grey is the sky – oooh lovely love – fucking daffodils dancing in the spring sun – fucking new deal employers fucking leeks and rugged scrum halves up to their bollocks in mud shouting numbers in the rain – the pubs puking souls out out out on Saturday nights – the the fucking joyriders burning the hillsides – the temazes stuck on tongues – the sulphur glow of orange lamps – th sound of factories at dawn – the karaoke queens in cymmer = green hills – choirs – male of course – come on taste it feel it come on down – lissen to this choir – cunts – lissen -

Welcome to your fears welcome to your dreams welcome to the welsh tourist board’s translation clinic – welcome to the real nuts and fucking bolts welcome to the burning eyes the torn torsos the gaping wounds – the – history – pistory – piss story – welcome welcome – to the psychiatric hospital we we all live in – welcome welcome – bore-fucking-da –

(Jones, 2001, p 140)
We were also influenced by the photographs of Gormley's vast industrial workshops. These images gave us the general setting for the production. The valleys had been the industrial heart of Wales, by setting the play in an industrial unit we could experiment with the concept of invention and manufacture.

Eventually the set (see video in portfolio) was a large open space with industrial girders, burnt out cars, ropes and roller shutter doors. All these were set on a bright red floor that signified the minor violence and anger of the characters. This red floor, also allowed us to create images with the human bodies of the actors as influenced by Gormley's metallic figures in A Critical Mass.
For Unprotected Sex (same production team) I had described the play as an (army) assault course of emotions. I had therefore asked the designers to construct an assault course based on the images of the artist Patrick Heron whose paintings had reminded me of camouflage with humanity and colour bursting to escape.

Garden Painting with Lemon  
Patrick Heron 1985
Summer Painting

Patrick Heron 1956
The non realistic setting again allowed a sense of expression in the play. The characters' relationships were dangerous, aggressive, angry and often violent. The muted colours of the camouflage paint finishes that covered the entire environment also had bursts of colour within them as influenced by Heron's painting which represented both the hope and the violent contrasts within the play's text. High above the set a lone gang plank was suspended. From its precarious height characters performed dangerous and often violent monologues.

(see video in portfolio box three)

In *Flesh and Blood* designed by Sean Crowley with lighting by Jason Taylor, the starting image had been the Swansea artist Jack Jones. His Lowryesque primitive paintings were a perfect metaphor for Griffin's play ie ordinary life in the shadow of the black mountain.
Although Griffin's text was naturalistic and set in a real council house on the Town Hill estate of Swansea, I wanted to explore the walls of that house. There was something primitive and often child-like in the way the family lived their lives. Jack Jones' little houses in a big world gave us the key to the on stage setting/image. Although funny, the play had a desperation about it, of working class families unable to survive economically, and sinking into debt financially, and their morality sinking with racist and abusive ideology. It was like the house/family was sliding off the mountain morally and economically and sinking into the quicksands of Swansea Bay before being drowned by the sea. I wanted to find a physical metaphor for this desperation. Eventually, after much discussion, walking around Swansea and walking the sea's edge in Swansea Bay we set the play on sinking sands. At the back of the stage was a large back cloth with Jack Jones' black mountain painted on it. The floor of the stage was a mass of sand and dirt, with recognised domestic objects like chairs, beds, tables etc sinking into the sand. On top of this floor cloth and environment of objects was a large ramp that flared from the back cloth of the mountain right across the floor, through the procession arch and out into the audience. It was dramatic, dangerous and expressive. On this ramp we constructed the council house in Town Hill with all the recognisable objects of existence, sofas, chairs, tables, doors, televisions, cookers etc. This house was slipping into the sea, (the audience) and was in danger of sinking into the sands of time.

(see video portfolio box 3)

The excitement of working on a production with a designer is one of my greatest joys. It demands broad metaphorical thinking and imagery. The process demands that we create a language that is epic and an environment that stimulates the actors and audience beyond the immediate, often domestic issues of the play. Creating such environments, and crucibles for experiment genuinely explodes the relevance of text for the audience into a broader domain and places a
production in a greater imagination of the audience challenging representation and profiling invention.
Towards a National Young People’s Theatre for Wales
Towards a National Young People's Theatre for Wales

A Ten Year Vision

By the late 1990s, it was becoming evident to us as a senior management team (SMT) that we would not be able to sustain either the artistic, the physical infrastructure or the staffing levels at the theatre on the current funding levels. The effects of the local government organisation and the loss of £80k from our core funding levels was beginning to have disastrous consequences at all levels of the theatre’s operation. We had also received standstill, non inflationary finance awards from the ACW and CCC. Of course the rest of the world traded at an inflationary rate. We remained loyal to our wage levels and recognised/agreed inflation with the unions but these year on year rising costs, were crippling the organisation particularly as the staffing levels were crucial to the existence of the organisation. I had also maintained that the staff were the greatest asset we possessed. Without their commitment and dedication the theatre would have gone under years ago. To be true to the staff it was agreed at SMT level to put together a paper, that realistically set out a possible future.

Artistically, we had cut our costs to the bone. We employed fewer actors, commissioned fewer plays and ensured that all our commissioned productions had few actors, employed hardly any visiting directors and kept our production budgets for scenery and costumes to a minimum. The physical structure of the building was failing. The roof leaked and we were unable to raise enough money to carry out a thorough repair job. The central heating system and air conditioning were failing making our customers extremely uncomfortable in the theatre. The main auditorium seating was becoming dangerous, with many of the seats coming away from the crumbling concrete structure and the upholstery was rotting. We had reduced the maintenance budget to an absolute minimum without jeopardising our legal requirement to trade. Consequently in terms of customers and the employees our building would soon become unfit for purpose. We reduced the staffing levels to a minimum. We avoided
redundancies by not replacing staff when someone left. The reduced staff situation was putting an enormous strain on the resources of the staff who were left. We restructured departments, amalgamated jobs and renegotiated staff job descriptions in order to keep the company going. The staff were extremely loyal and adamant that the theatre would survive. We needed to identify new income streams and pressurise the funding bodies to increase our monies. We had increased seat prices, but we felt if we did this again it would jeopardise our work as a young people's theatre and would therefore exclude younger people from being able to partake of our product. We had been successful in identifying new private business partners who would invest in the theatre, but in the main, they invested in new projects, particularly in education, youth theatre and participation departments which basically needed all of the financial investment to ensure their existence. We were unable to raise monies that would be a profit income stream and work towards reducing our growing deficit. We were in a Catch-22 situation. Consequently we, the SMT, decided to create a document that projected a ten year vision for the Sherman as a National Theatre for Young People, and realistically state that the status quo was not an option. The Board of Directors agreed with this way forward.

Fortunately, we had made a small profit, over and above the projected target income on the main stage Christmas show, the world premiere of Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach. We decided to use the small profit to employ an eminent and respected arts consultant to work with us in producing the document.

Peter Boyden, of Peter Boyden Associates was based in Bristol and worked extensively as an arts and financial consultant throughout the UK. He had successfully worked with the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield and the Welsh National Opera securing them stronger base financial grant unit from their funders. He was also the consultant who had advised the Minister for Culture, Chris Smith in Westminster, that the subsidised theatre industry of England was in danger of complete collapse unless
the government made a substantial increase in their grant aid across England. Boyden had produced an in depth report for Smith which in turn enabled him to persuade the government to invest millions of new monies in the subsidised producing houses of England. We felt that Boyden had first hand knowledge to advise us on how to create and construct this new document.

Working with the Board of Management, the SMT and the complete staff of the theatre, Boyden advised us at all levels during the construction of the document. We held brainstorming and visionary exercises and seminars with the Board, each individual department of the theatre, the recognised staff meeting structure and with young people. We were adamant that the new document would be positive, challenging, realistic and visionary.

It was agreed by everyone working on the project that we should return to the 1990 recommendations of the Trickey report and the ACW appraisal team recommendations of 1995 that fully supported in major young people’s theatre provision in the capital city. During this process, we decided that we should extend our vision and aspirations and create a National Theatre for Young People in Wales. Consequently in 2001 we produced “The Sherman, a National Young People’s Theatre for Wales – A Ten Year Vision – A Three Year Business Plan” document.

(See portfolio box 1)

The summary of the primary recommendations was as follows:

- to refocus the identity of the Sherman as a National Young People’s Theatre for Wales
- to invest in the skills of the current staff and practitioners to create a Young People’s artistic base in Wales and in so doing create a centre of artistic excellence
• to create an artistically driven but financially sustainable future for the Sherman theatre
• to strive over a ten year plan to become The National Theatre for Young People
• to increase the number of Sherman Theatre Company productions from three per year to a minimum of eight per year by 2006
• to commission new writing for young people
• to provide viable employment for actors and create an additional 300 weeks of work
• to increase the amount of touring to all parts of Wales
• to reinforce the international links that the theatre had built up in Europe and the USA

The document stated that the ‘status quo’ was not an option and that change was imperative for the viable future of the theatre. The document also stated that in the five years prior to its publication, due to local government re-organisation and non-inflationary grants that there was a funding gap of £500,000 shortfall in grant aid.

On completion, and with ratification by the Board of Directors, the document was formally presented to the ACW and CCC with the aim of them endorsing the recommendations and finding ways of raising the £500,000 shortfall in grant aid.

This had been a positive process for everyone at the Sherman. The document made sound artistic and financial recommendations with which everyone had agreed. The response from ACW and CCC was positive and they recognised that the recommendations were of sound artistic and financial worth.

Over the following twelve months the ACW decided to review their English language theatre in Wales’s policy. They employed Peter Boyden to spearhead the review. As a result of this development our
vision paper was put on hold, until the results of their internal review were announced.

Over the next few years, the ACW recognised that the Sherman, along with other of their clients, needed a financial investment in order to secure a future. They then introduced a stabilisation programme within Wales and the Sherman was invited to apply in 2003.

Three years had passed. We at the Sherman became anxious that the process of stabilisation (which eventually went on for two more years) was too slow to address the dire needs of the organisation. The years 2000 – 2007 became extremely turbulent for the Sherman artistically and financially and the situation remains to the present day of my writing. However, this paper only addresses the years 1990 – 2000 and the situation that evolved at the Sherman and within the English language theatre in Wales must remain the content of a separate paper.

What did become evident by 2000, was that CCC would only respond when the ACW had formulated their policy for English language theatre in Wales. Consequently, the issues of survival escalated within the Sherman as an organisation and the future of the theatre as a young people’s theatre lay in the balance artistically and financially.
Conclusion

Recording my ten years of work as Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the Sherman Theatre (1990 – 2000) has demanded that I inhabit a world that is relatively new to me, namely that of looking back, deconstructing and reassessing the past.

A majority of my artistic existence is concerned with the present – the now. Any one performance exists only in the moment and can only be experienced in that moment. The next performance will be a different experience; the world will have changed, our understanding of the world will have changed, the moment will be different, the act of theatre will automatically be different.

Any performance can only create parameters for an audience’s understanding, involvement and reaction, but it cannot control their response. It can however, capitalise upon this response and use it to inform, develop and/or recreate future moments of theatre.

When I am not creating a piece of theatre I am setting up future projects and structures that allow a group of artists to come together to create a unique artistic event. Consequently my existence is dominated by the present and the future.

As Artistic Director and Chief Executive my creativity was at all times informed by the artistic product. An analysis of the artistic worth of the past product often positively informed the present and future work.

Consequently recording and reassessing the ten years’ work has been an enormous challenge; I have had to discipline my natural artistic tendency to not be concerned with the ‘now’ and the future, but to become analytical and passionate about the past.
I am no stranger to such disciplines or emotions and of course I am interested in the past. It is the history of mankind that has informed theatre from the beginning of time and although I have an understanding and limited practical knowledge of such wide concepts, I have created work that is, in the main reflective of a contemporary existence.

If my work has been historical in its context, my greatest concern has been its relevance to the contemporary existence of my audience.

If there is any purpose to these current writings it has to be to inform my future practice, to learn from my mistakes and to capitalise upon the successes.

As we moved into the 21st century, the very role of the Arts Council of Wales began to be threatened by the Welsh Assembly Government who began to bypass the ACW on funding issues and started funding such organisations as the National Botanic Gardens, the Chamber Orchestra of Wales, Brecon Jazz and Clwyd Theatr Cymru directly, avoiding the democratic role of the ACW as the assessors of cultural worth and threatening the founding principal of 'arms length' funding as established by Jenny Lee when she invented the Art Council of Great Britain in the 1950s.

In the same climate, Cardiff lost the bid to become Cultural Capital of Europe 2008. Also, because so much money had been attached to the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay, Cardiff cultural clients have been excluded from any new arts monies. Certain geographical areas of Cardiff were excluded from European funding (including the Sherman). At the beginning of the 21st century we witnessed the closure of the Centre for Visual Arts in Cardiff. All these factors made for a very culturally dismal capital city.

Ultimately, this is Wales. This is Cardiff and Wales' most celebrated living playwright, Ed Thomas, who had never secured any revenue.
funding for the work of his company Y Cwmni/Fiction Factory, yet the Cardiff bid to become Cultural Capital of Europe 2008 used a quote from Thomas' writing, “take me somewhere good” as the strap line for their marketing campaign.

Perhaps they should more appropriately use a quote from Thomas' play, *East of the Gantry*, “then I open my eyes on the bitter silence of now” (1992) as a reflection on English language theatre in Wales at the end of the 20th century, particularly in Cardiff.

But not a million miles away, over the border in England, new ideas were happening and there was a cultural growth. Liverpool won the bid to be Cultural Capital of Europe 2008 and ultimately received a great financial reward. Cardiff didn’t win, but neither did Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gateshead but they did create the biggest music centre in Britain, The Sage. They’d built a magnificent Millennium Bridge of architectural renown. The Baltic Art Gallery had opened. The Angel of the North, by sculptor Anthony Gormley had put sculpture on the world map. Live Theatre Company and Northumberland University had established the first North East transition theatre company for young professional actors and Newcastle’s Northern Stage Ensemble was established as a European centre for theatre arts – all this from a city that lost the bid.

In Plymouth and Sheffield the local theatres have been working in partnership with ACE and their local authorities to ensure that the world perceives Sheffield Theatres and Plymouth Theatres as collaborative centres of excellence with shared regional ownership and pride. Not for these cities an ‘us’ and ‘them’ philosophy. By bringing together the cities’ theatres programming and marketing them together, their communities have experienced a collective, positive and inclusive cultural provision within the region.
The ACE awarded new monies to Birmingham Rep to commission and produce new plays for young people with large casts on the main stage and the studio theatre.

Unicorn Theatre for Young People, London, begun building Britain’s first ever purpose built theatre for young audiences on the South Bank in London.

The ACE successfully established an annual award for professional playwrights who write for young audiences.

The media companies of England continue working with the regional theatres. Channel 4 funds young director schemes, and London Weekend Television (LWT) financially commits to an annual New Plays on Stage Award.

New Creative Partnerships Schemes have been invented all over England to pursue excellence and collaboration in arts for young people with new monies. These new initiatives had been created in partnership with the regional local authorities.

But that is all over the border.

Having worked for over thirty years as a professional in young people’s theatre, four concepts have remained important to me, potential, pride, recognition and empowerment.

On the day of the opening performance of the Sherman’s Acting Out Cardiff project for young non-school attenders, I was talking to one of the performers, a 14 year old teenager from the Ely estate in Cardiff. It was lunchtime, the show opened that night and he was sitting on his own in the Sherman foyer.

“Are you looking forward to tonight? I asked.

“Yes,” he said “but I’m a bit nervous.”
"That's ok" I replied, "we all get nervous making theatre. You're not alone."

"Really?" he asked

"Yes" I replied

"The thing is ..." he hesitated, "I just want my mum to be proud of me".

The conversation just summed up the reason that the Sherman existed. He wanted his mum's recognition for his unique achievements.

His young potential, pride, recognition and empowerment were important. It was necessary for the Sherman as a Young People's theatre to ensure that its young and emerging artists had status within the democracy of the organisation.

I wanted recognition for the artists, workers and staff of the Sherman for what they had achieved through working for and with young people for ten years.

From this ten years' work, certain ambitions have died, others have emerged and a majority have been redefined in a more realistic process of possible achievement. My main ambition in 1990 was to run a regional theatre, but more importantly to create a policy within a regional theatre that had direct relevance to young people and its community. I feel that I was successful in achieving this. Today I have no great ambition to run a regional theatre. I am far more interested in creating artistic work that has a relevance to young people and the community. Buildings and institutions eat up and devour your energies. They demand that you continually fight for their existence within the political and economic climate of the region. There is a continuing need to liaise with the funding bodies. You have to be fully aware of current legislation on VAT, health and safety, licensing and risk assessment etc. These are just the tip of the iceberg of bureaucracy that demands your full attention. So many of these issues automatically distract you from the artistic energy and invention of theatre making. As a result of 15 years running the Sherman
I remain passionate about theatre ‘making’ and exhausted and disillusioned by theatre ‘running’.

The clearest of these ambitions, and I suppose my primary reason for existence is to create the art that is reflective of who I am, and has in my belief and understanding a positive purpose in society to help humanity understand, challenge, change and re-invent the world in which we live through the concepts of empowerment, equality, shared authority, shared knowledge and collaboration.

Conclusions can be drawn from history. The history that is 1990 – 2000 of the Sherman Theatre informed the document Sherman Theatre – A Ten Year Vision in 2000/01. Already that is history and the world of the Sherman has again moved on. Much has happened for the Sherman in the years 2000 – 2007, but that is not the subject of these writings.

In his 1996 book, Stage Welsh, (p 60) David Adams concludes his writing with his own personal dream and vision of Welsh theatre of the future. Interestingly, the Sherman Theatre is not a part of his dream. I could justify this by saying that the then five year old policy of the Sherman was still developing and stabilising itself before having any major implication on the cultural agenda for Wales. More realistically though, I suspect that theatre for and by young people will remain unimportant and irrelevant to such chroniclers of Welsh theatre. He visions possible centres for young people’s theatre in Aberystwyth, Mold and Cardiff, but no writers, directors or play titles and certainly no youth theatre. Most theatre practitioners still view work for young people as ‘a way into,’ ‘a stepping stone’ to the real profession. A way to get your equity card. A way to get at least one professional credit on your virgin curriculum vitae. For those of us theatre professionals who remain dedicated to making theatre for and with young people, it is important that we continue to strive to educate the politicians, policy makers and funding bodies that our practice is not a ‘stepping stone’ to proper grown up theatre. Our theatre is grown up and continues to grow. It has a rightful place in the artistic
portfolio of world theatre. It has its own demands, energies, visions, expert practice and self worth and therefore demands recognition and status.

For now it seems, Wales has given its commitment to young people through the Theatre-in-Education companies. It seems that the youth of today in Wales, unlike those in England, Ireland, Russia, Canada, etc, do not deserve a building dedicated to them. I wonder if anyone asked them!

In his book, *Black Book on the Welsh Theatre* (1985), (p 122) Dedwydd Jones reprints his letter to *The Stage* newspaper of the 8th September 1983 that comments on the un-Welshness of the Sherman Theatre’s then 10th anniversary season of 1983, where not one Welsh play was included in the twelve month celebrations.

Well, between 1990 and 2000 I did manage to change that. We commissioned and presented over 100 new plays by Welsh/Wales based writers on stage, TV, and radio. Even so, it did not sustain our funding and the question still arises, ‘what does Wales want from its theatre?’ The answer from the audiences of Wales, the young people of Wales, the people in political power in Wales, the civil servants of Wales, and the theatre practitioners of Wales, will, I am adamant, vastly differ from each other.

My personal mission has been, to be loyal and responsive to the young people of Wales as theatre makers and theatre goers and not just to include them in our policy but to place them at the centre of the Sherman’s artistic policy and mission and to enable them to find a public voice and empower them to stand up for their beliefs and visions in a democratic society.

There is always a waiting list of young people wanting to participate in the Sherman Youth Theatre. Throughout the 90s we consistently achieved
the projected box office targets of the productions we created for young audiences. By the end of the century our major consistency was to fail to achieve realistic financial recognition from the funding bodies. Alongside the productions I have talked about in this paper there are other productions throughout the 1990s which I believe were important artistic developments and achievements in establishing a YPT at the Sherman.


Other productions I believe to be important throughout the 1990s were:

**A Kiss on the Bottom** (1991) and **Erogenous Zones** (1992) original plays by Frank Vickery. The productions allowed us to create new, regular audiences for the Sherman and start an important dialogue with Vickery that would last ten years when he wrote for our main stage, studio space, HTV Lunchtime drama series and the BBC Radio Wales Lunchtime Plays. Here was a local writer, who worked constantly with us and helped develop the policy of the theatre. *A Kiss on the Bottom* alongside being a very funny play and tackled the theme of cancer, allowed us to create an all women's show on the main stage that played
to sell out audiences for three and a half weeks. *Erogenous Zones*, a cleverly constructed play about cheating on your partner helped us to develop audiences in the 20-30 year old age range.

**Under Milk Wood (1991/92)** Dylan Thomas’ seminal play for voices allowed me to create a large main stage production that toured throughout Wales, England and four weeks in the USA. By taking this classic text it allowed me to achieve three goals. Firstly to make a classic text relevant to a contemporary society, secondly to place GCSE school examination text central within a season and create workshops and play days for the young audiences and thirdly to extend our audiences outside Cardiff nationally and internationally.

**Fern Hill** by Mike Kenny (1992)

Following the success of *Under Milk Wood*, I commissioned Mike Kenny to write, through workshops with actors, an original play based on Dylan Thomas’ well known poem *Fern Hill*. Like the poem, the play was an exploration into the adolescence of young teenagers in Wales. This production allowed us to create theatre for young audiences in a new and exciting way into actors, designers, directors and musicians working alongside the writer in workshops.

**A Taste of Honey** by Sheila Delaney (1994)

Delaney’s play is set in Manchester, and I made a radical decision to transpose it to Cardiff. Many of the social issues of Manchester suburbs had a similarity to the docklands of Cardiff and indeed the working class communities of the South Wales Valleys. Again this was a GCSE school examination text and I wanted to discover the relevance of the play to young people living in Wales. This production also allowed us to establish a policy of touring the examination set text throughout Wales. We developed this policy within Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1995), *Julius Caesar* and *Henry V* (1997) and Ackbourne’s *Table Manners* (1996) and Barry Hurt’s *Kes* (1996).
Alongside the success of *A Generation Arises* that used professional actors working in partnership with young and emerging artists through the production, we also created new productions of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and the world premiere of Roald Dahl’s *Boy*.

These productions epitomised the policy of creating theatre for and with young people. They ensured that we could create large productions, with a contemporary relevance for young audiences.


Alongside our unique partnerships with BBC Radio Wales and HTV Wales it was also important to create partnerships with theatre directors within the British theatre industry. Productions such as *The Caretaker* (1990) directed by Annie Castledine, *My Beautiful Launderette* (1991) directed by Kate Rowland, *The Wesker Double Bill* (1997) directed by Michael Bogdanov and *Macbeth* (1994) directed by Jamie Gavin all allowed us to develop this policy and a dialogue with recognised British directors.

It was a primary aim for me, when accepting the post in 1990, to ensure that the artistic work we produced was of the highest calibre and relevance to a contemporary audience. Further information on all the above shows is contained in the accompanying portfolio boxes two and three.

I came to the Sherman with a burning ambition to change and challenge the predominantly safe, white, middle-class culture of regional theatre. I
wanted to open the front door, the stage door and all points of access to encourage the artists and communities of Cardiff and South Wales to use the theatre as a community resource to see contemporary world theatre, and to create new cutting edge politically relevant contemporary Welsh theatre.

Phil Clark has transformed the Sherman Theatre from prime evidence of the imminent death of mainstream drama into a vibrant and exciting venue by enthusiastically importing many of the values of community theatre to the main stage.

(David Adams, The Guardian newspaper, 1993)

Adams develops the observation in his book, *Stage Welsh*,

... the Sherman Theatre Company has translated community values to the main stage

(Adams, 1996, p 49)

He also observes,

under the artistic direction of Phil Clark, the Sherman is one manifestation of the tradition that has grown up since the birth of theatre in Wales in the 1960s, a tradition that puts accessibility high on its priorities and has community theatre at the core of its provision. Phil Clark says that his artistic policy would be the same wherever he was and that he doesn't have a ‘Welsh theatre’ agenda ... But by choosing plays that often resonate locally and by employing actors who are frequently involved in the Welsh theatre debate, Clark (a Welshman whose roots are in community theatre) does, albeit inadvertently (he would say) produce what might be seen as a distinctly Welsh theatre. The form and style of his main stage productions tends to utilise the techniques of community theatre – popularish, audience friendliness, and local actors.

(Adams, 1996, p 49)

That was what I set out to do and it was useful that by 1996 Adams was recognising the objectives and their worth. Because Adams was publishing such observations in his book and in the national newspapers the concept of ‘community’ began to have credibility and status within a public building and was not just viewed as being ‘politically correct’. It was important that the values of my work at the Sherman were recorded with such status. It was what I set out to achieve.
Over ten years 1,200,479 people attended performances at the Sherman, 5,800 performances took place, 705,054 people attended a Sherman Theatre Company show, 2,749 Sherman Theatre Company performances took place, 128 new plays were commissioned and produced, 47 commissioned plays performed by the Sherman Theatre Company were published, 48 Sherman Theatre Company productions had been broadcast on radio and television, 495,425 people had attended performances by visiting theatre companies, 3,059 performances had been staged by visiting companies and 155,846 attendances by 10,313 young people participating in 5676 youth theatre events.

We were becoming the award-winning Sherman Theatre.

- Winner of the **BBC Wales Arts Enabling Award**
- Winner of the **Barclays Stage Partnership Award** for *Rise and Fall* (with Mappa Mundi Theatre Company)
- Winner of the **Writers Guild of Great Britain Award for Best Play for Young People** with Charles Way's *A Spell of Cold Weather*
- Winner of the **Arts for Young Audiences Award** for Phil Clark, Artistic Director from the Commonwealth Conference for Young People in Canada
- Winner of the **Barclays Stage Partnership Award** for *Flesh and Blood* by Helen Griffin
- Voted in *The Times* Top Ten Christmas Shows in Britain for *The Dark is Rising* by Susan Cooper
- Voted in *The Independent on Sunday's Top Ten Christmas Shows in Britain* for *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Anderson
- Voted **Critic's Choice in The Independent** for *The One Hundred and One Dalmatians*
- Winner of **The Western Mail's Best Plays in Wales Award** for *The Borrowers*
• Winner of *The Western Mail’s The Theatre Directors of Note Award* for *The Borrowers*

• Winner of *The Women of Theatre Award* for Helen Griffin in *Caitlin*

• Winner of *The Arts & Business Cymru Staff Involvement Partnership Award* with Evershed’s Solicitors

• Nominated for *Best New Writing* in the Theatre in Wales Website Awards for *Caitlin*

• Nominated for *Best New Production* in the Theatre in Wales Website Awards for *Caitlin*

• Nominated for the *National Arts & Business Staff Involvement Partnership Award* with Evershed’s Solicitors

• Winner of Arts Council of England’s *Playwright of the Year for Young People* for Charles Way, writer of *The Borrowers*

• Voted in *The Independent on Sunday’s Top Ten Christmas Shows* for Roald Dahl’s *The BFG*

• Phil Clark was nominated for *BBC Wales Artist of the Year*

• Sian Phillips was nominated for *BBC Wales Artist of the Year* for her performance in *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen

• Frank Vickery was nominated for the Lloyds Private Banking *Playwright of the Year* for his play *Loose Ends*

• *Erogenous Zones* by Frank Vickery was nominated for *Best Regional Play* by the Writers Guild of Great Britain for a MacAllan Award

• *Under the Bed* by Brendan Murray was nominated for *Best Children’s Play* by the Writers Guild of Great Britain (with Theatre Centre)

• *Croesi'r Afon / Crossing the River* by Mari Gwillym was short listed for *London Weekend Television Plays on Stage Award*

• *Erogenous Zones* by Frank Vickery was short listed for *London Weekend Television Plays on Stage Award*

• The following plays commissioned and presented in partnership with HTV Wales were nominated for *BAFTA Cymru Awards*: Frank Vickery’s *Sleeping with Mickey*, *Bedside Manners and Drag Factor*, and Nigel Crowle’s *Shorten Curlies*. 
In 1990 I arrived in Cardiff with a burning ambition to create a major theatre for young audiences in Wales. That ambition hasn’t burnt out. I still desperately want to make important, relevant and exciting theatre for young audiences. In reality, I’ve come to realise that the partnership vision, shared between the Arts Council of Wales and South Glamorgan County Council of 1990 to create a major theatre for young people no longer exists. But even with this recognition I remain passionate for the artists who create this work and the young audiences who are the future of British theatre.

If the future of the Sherman is not as a young people’s theatre, which I fear is the case, it is important to recognise the work of the artists, young people and emerging artists that contributed to the work of the Sherman Theatre throughout the 1990s. There is no doubt that their commitment to creating work for and with young people did have an effect on the theatre industry and the communities in South Wales. Many of the new plays continue to be performed locally, nationally and internationally. Many of the young participants have capitalised upon their experience in their youth at the Sherman to inform their adult lives.

Wales has achieved its Assembly Government. It still struggles for greater autonomy and independence, but independence doesn’t necessarily mean ‘going it alone’. Opportunities now exist to trade and create partnerships with other (independent) states. I remember at school singing the old Sankey hymn, Jesus Bids us Shine, the last line read:

You in your small corner and I in mine

(EO, Ececell, 1893, p 590)
Now is the time to look out from our small corner. Look across the borders. Look across the seas. Look to Europe. Be part of a global philosophy. Together we can instigate change. Together we can shine.

Much has happened at the Sherman Theatre in ten years. It has reinvented itself in the time between the Trickey report of 1989/90 and the Boyden report of 2000. Most, if not all of the Trickey recommendations and objectives were achieved. The recommendations of the Boyden report are still there, waiting to be addressed. Invention is never ending, and hopefully eternal.

These are and remain some selected thoughts, observations and lessons learnt in response to my ten years of leading the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff. I am not a scholar or an academic in the traditional sense. I am an artist. This, then is an artist’s account.

Time for the next ten years of making theatre for young audiences. It's what I do. I can and will do it anywhere and everywhere.

On May 12th 2005, The Stage newspaper featured an interview by Jeremy Austin with Charlotte Jones, the Director of the Independent Theatre Council (ITC). In the article, Jones comments,

I don't think the arts can be created by strategy and prescription. [Artists] need to be nurtured and encouraged and given the freedom to make work that they want to make. Ultimately good theatre comes from the idea, the idea comes from the person and the person has to have the right environment in which to work ... it is young people’s theatre that is going to renew theatre.

It has been important to record the work of the 1990s at the Sherman. Hopefully, like the work itself, these writings will inform the policy makers of the future in the arts in Wales. I still strongly believe that there is a need, a necessity for a major young people's theatre in Wales that raises the standard and awareness of work for and with young people to a national level. In order for this to happen the policy makers and
politicians have to listen to the artists of Wales and invest in young audiences. Daily we observe our young professional theatre practitioners having to leave Wales to receive recognition of their talents. Wales has to find a way of celebrating this talent in the English and Welsh language on home soil. Of course it is important for artists to move around the world and work in new and varied communities, but it is also important for them to be given the opportunity to create some of their best work here in Wales on stage and in film, TV and radio. That is why a system needs to be generated in Wales that allows for these opportunities. There also needs to be a parity between the two major languages of Wales, English and Welsh. An equal status and financial recognition and parity needs to be achieved throughout the cultural industries.

On reflection I have a number of personal positive achievements within the ten years. My aim to translate the theory of inclusion into genuine professional theatre practice was achieved. By the end of the ten years young people were positively and actively involved in the theatre's product and practice as actors, writers, musicians, technicians, designers, writers, administrators and directors. Many young emerging artists began their professional careers at the Sherman and soon progressed to work for prestigious theatres and companies throughout Britain. Many of the participants went on to work in the media across Britain. I feel proud that we trained young professionals at the Sherman who could engage with fellow professional artists with status throughout the world. We were successful in creating a genuine 'familiar congregation' within the creative sector. Actors, writers, designers and directors returned to work for the company. There was a great 'family' feeling within the immediate and extended community of the theatre. We were also successful in achieving this concept with our audiences. Our work with writer, Frank Vickery and his audience, alongside the established audiences for the Christmas shows on the main stage and in the studio theatre and the returning audiences for our HTV Lunchtime Plays and the BBC Radio Drama seasons were all positive proof that the work we were producing was accepted by the community. The debates
with audiences, parents and artists, not just about the current work, but the complete portfolio of new theatre created over the years, was proof of a 'positive congregation'.

There are very few regional theatres that can boast of presenting over one hundred new plays in ten years. It was a great achievement and one necessary to ensure that the product was contemporary and relevant. I knew it was a risk to pursue such a policy but it proved to be important ensuring that the Sherman's work was unique. Alongside the new writing was the achievement of working across the spectrum of theatre, radio and television. I do not know of any other British theatre that has achieved this goal and I feel this was a real personal achievement.

By pursuing a positive policy of inclusiveness, I believe that we were successful in engaging with artists and audiences of all ages and ensured that our product continued to re-invent itself in both form and content in a contemporary setting.

If I had the chance to re-live those ten years, there are, on reflection, many other initiatives I would have added to the policy and working practice. Hindsight is a great thing! To a certain extent I was too loyal to Wales. I made an early decision to invest in Welsh theatre makers. I don't apologise for this as it reaped great benefits but by and large I ignored the artists that I had previously worked with in England for many years. I should have been far more ambitious and included those artists from my previous work within the debate of theatre within Wales. This would have led to a greater and richer debate and guarded against isolation, therefore opening up a wider theatre conversation with artists across Britain.

We achieved a greater inclusion in the work from the black and Asian professional artists due to our multicultural casting policy for all our work than the theatre had previously achieved, but we still failed to include the multicultural communities of Cardiff in our audience development
programme and youth theatre participation. I should have created more multicultural outreach projects in the high density multicultural communities of the city.

One area I feel I should have pioneered was a partnership with a university department that could have charted the development of our audiences and participants. It would have been useful to have gathered some hard facts and statistics through a mapping exercise, as to the development of young people as theatre attendees and makers over these years. Such factual evidence could have helped us to prove that an investment in young people at an early age ensured an audience for the future.

Thousands of young people participated in the youth theatre department in those ten years. There is no doubt that we should have set up an alumni organisation within the theatre to track our young participants. It would have allowed us the opportunity to continue with them through adolescence into adulthood and consequently would have informed our programming policy ensuring that it remained positive, realistic, relevant and contemporary.

Personally, I feel I proved to myself and the wider community that it is possible for any regional theatre to genuinely involve young people within the theatre's policy with status. Towards the end of the 1990s we were beginning to see other regional theatres throughout Britain extend and develop their participation process. This was extremely evident in such theatres as the Birmingham Rep and the Theatre Royal in York. This proved to me that the concept was not peculiar to the Sherman or Wales. Were I to run a regional theatre again I would include participation and inclusion high on my agenda as a vital resource in order to achieve success, recognition and relevance within the community.

Hopefully, this overview of the work of the Sherman in the 1990s has demonstrated what is possible within the cultural debate in Wales. The
achievements of the work by its artists deserve recognition and chronicling and this overview set out to record these achievements that were unique to the Sherman as an organisation.

I believe it still remains a priority for Wales to invest in young people within the theatre world. The Youth Theatre movement of Wales needs organising, challenging and galvanising into a recognised movement with status, as has been achieved in England through the establishing of the National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT) that co-ordinates the work of youth theatres on a national level.

I still think it is important that Wales should have a National Young People's Theatre building. It would allow a greater focus for the work of YPT and its participants. It would be a haven for the encouragement of emerging artists, and a shop window to the world to celebrate the best in YPT in Wales.

For me personally, I left the Sherman in December 2006. It was time for someone else to head the organisation, and for me personally to find new challenges in the world. I continue to work in theatre for young audiences, and I will continue to do so for the rest of my life. I need to be challenged by the new voices of emerging artists. The generation of artist that arose out of the 1990s at the Sherman Theatre always challenged me and will I am sure continue to do so for the foreseeable future – thankfully.

(Curtain)
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*The Stage* Newspaper, (12th May 2005)


Wagner, B. J. (1979) *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a learning medium*, Hutchinson and Co.


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Appendix

Contents of:

Portfolio Boxes One, Two and Three
BOX ONE

Policy, Administration, Marketing, Youth Theatre and Education

POLICY

Feasibility Study – Sherman Theatre Ltd
Proposed change in Artistic Policy from April 1990
Adrian Trickey 1989

Sherman Theatre, Report of an Appraisal Team
Arts Council of Wales Drama Department 1994

Summary of Appraisal Response Notes
Sherman Theatre Senior Management Team Meeting
October 1994

Sherman Theatre
A National Young People’s Theatre for Wales
A Ten Year Vision
A Three Year Business Plan
Created by the Directors, Senior Management and Staff of the Sherman Theatre in consultation with Peter Boyden, Arts Consultant 2000
ADMINISTRATION

Phil Clark’s CV
Job description of Artistic Director and Chief Executive
A Cultural Flagship in Cardiff - Statistics
The Award Winning Sherman Theatre
Corporate Brochure
What The Press Say
Staff Handbook and Policies
Appraisal Guidelines for Appraisers
Appraisal Process – Self Assessment Review
Financial Regulations
Introduction Pack for Potential New Directors
Budget Estimates
Example of Revenue Funding Application to Cardiff County Council
Example of Revenue Funding Application to Arts Council of Wales
Example of Project Grant Application to Arts Council of Wales
Production and Audience Development
Creating a New Writing Culture with Status,
Sherman Theatre Response to Arts Council of Wales’
New Writing in Wales, Consultation
Plays Commissioned by The Sherman Theatre Company
Sherman Bid to the Arts Council of Wales for New Writing at the
Sherman
A Culture in Common
Sherman Theatre response to National Assembly of Wales’
Consultancy Process 2001
A Sherman Theatre response to the Proposed Re-structuring of
Arts Council of Wales
A Sherman Theatre response to the National Assembly of Wales’ report
Arts Review
A Sherman Theatre response to Arts Council of Wales’ consultancy
A Welsh Language Theatre Company: Y Pwerdy

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Does Wales Care About The Arts
  General Arts Lobby for Wales GALW
  Leaflet produced to influence the proposed policy of the
  National Assembly of Wales
GALW’s response to the National Assembly of Wales, Review of the
  Arts and Culture in Wales
Putting The Arts At The Heart of Wales
  Wales Association of Performing Arts (WAPA) leaflet to influence
  the National Assembly of Wales Culture Committee
MARKETING

Example of Corporate Brochure 1996
Example of Corporate Brochure 2001
The Sherman – Much More Than Just A Theatre
Press and Publicity Quotes on Policy, Shows and The Building
Example of Review Pack on Sherman Theatre Company Show for Children
   Roald Dahl’s *The Enormous Crocodile*
   Roald Dahl’s *James and the Giant Peach*
   Winter 2001
Example of Review Pack on Sherman Theatre Company Show for Adults
   *Caitlin* by Mike Kenny
   2003
Examples of give away publicity material, including bookmarks and postcards
Example of Summary of Findings. Audience Research Project 2003
A Selection of Media/Press Releases
Membership and Mailing List publicity material
Te Sherman Messenger – Internal Staff Newsletter, Produced by Staff
A Selection of Season Brochures 1990 to 2000
An Example of an Audio Season Brochure
An Example of a Braille Season Brochure

A SELECTION OF PRESS CUTTINGS FROM THE EARLY 1990s
YOUTH THEATRE AND EDUCATION

Public/Press Quotes on the Work of the Youth Theatre and Education Dept.

A Snapshot of the Sherman Youth Theatre 2000

What is Sherman Youth Theatre

Start Partners Project – A Partnership with Industry

Creative Solutions to:
- Effective Team Building
- Vocal and Physical Confidence
- Cross Departmental Communication
- Engaging and Entertaining Conferences and AGMs
- Acting Out Cardiff Policy and Mission Statement
- Working with the University of Glamorgan

Example of Education and Teachers Resource Pack
- Key Stage One

Example of Education and Teachers Resource Pack
- Key Stage Two

Scene – The quarterly journal of International Schools Theatre Association

New York Residency 2003 Report by Phil Clark

A Partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme

Magazine produced by Welsh Joint Education Committee

Approaches to the Study of Drama in Wales, by Mandy Esseen

Workbook encouraging Drama Teachers in Schools to use the Published plays of the Sherman Theatre Company and others
BOX TWO

Artistic Work 1990 to 2000

CONTENTS

SHERMAN THEATRE PRODUCTIONS 1990 – 2000
Publicity flyer and programme pertaining to all the shows I personally directed

A SELECTION OF MY PRODUCTION NOTEBOOKS
Boy by Roald Dahl
Erogenous Zones by Frank Vickery
Under Milk Wood by Dylan Thomas
Fern Hill by Mike Kenny
Matilda by Roald Dahl
A Taste of Honey by Sheila Delaney
A Kiss on the Bottom by Frank Vickery

A GENERATION ARISES
Production notebook and scripts

A NATIONAL THEATRE FOR WALES
Published proposal

EXAMPLES OF ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS
Corporate Print Brochure
The Award Winning Sherman Theatre
Sherman Theatre Company Shows 1990 to 2000
Plays commissioned by the Sherman Theatre Company
Sherman Theatre Company Co-productions and Collaborations from 1990
Example – Publicity Leaflet for Saturday Young Scene
Example – Publicity Leaflet for International Children’s Theatre Festival
Example – Publicity Leaflet for Youth Theatre and Education Work

PUBLISHED PLAY TEXTS COMMISSIONED BY THE SHERMAN THEATRE COMPANY

Erogenous Zones by Frank Vickery, pub. Samuel French 1994
A Kiss on the Bottom by Frank Vickery, pub. Samuel French 1995
Loose Ends by Frank Vickery, pub. Samuel French 1995
Love Fourty by Frank Vickery, pub. Samuel French 1997
Roots and Wings by Frank Vickery, pub. Samuel French 1997
Biting the Bullet by Frank Vickery, pub. Samuel French 1997
The 101 Dalmations by Dodie Smith, adapted by Glyn Robins,
    pub. Samuel French 1997
Act One Wales, edited by Phil Clark, pub. Seren Books 1997
- The Drag Factor by Frank Vickery
- Looking Out To Sea by Charles Way
- The Old Petrol Station by Tim Rhys
- The Ark by Helen Griffin
- A Night Under Canvas by Lisa Hunt
- The Ogpu Men by lan Rowlands
Sleeping with Mickey by Frank Vickery, pub. Parthian Books 2001

The HTV Sherman Plays published by the Drama Association of Wales

1994
- The Ogpu Men by lan Rowlands
- The Drag Factor by Frank Vickery
- The Ark by Helen Griffin
- Shorten Curlies by Nigel Crowle

1995
- The Wind Netters by Ian Staples
- Shared Mutual Experience by Lesley Ross
- The Last Dream by Andrew Reid
- In The Blinking of an Eye by Jermy Hylton Davies
- Surfing Carmarthen Bay by Roger Williams
- A Night Under Canvas by Lisa Hunt

1996
- Mental by Helen Griffin and Jo Brand
- Wits End by Neil Rhodes
- The Beach Inspector by Alan Osborne
- Bedside Manner by Frank Vickery
- Takes Two to Tango by Nigel Crowle
- Flying Blind by Lisa Hunt

1997
- Sweet BA by Anwen Huws
- Break My Heart by Arnold Wesker
- A Slags Gig by Sera Moore-Williams

PUBLICATIONS
Theatre for Children and Young People, ed Stuart Bennett
Published by Aurora Metro 2005
Chapter – Come in Out Of The Rain
More than just a building - a day in the life of the Sherman Theatre
Phil Clark and Margaret Jones

A FOLDER OF WRITTEN ARTICLES, FEATURES AND INTERVIEWS
- History Ends With Us. A practitioner’s view of the work of Theatre Y
  Byd by Phil Clark 1995.
  Published by Bydbooks 1995
- Vickery at the Sherman by Phil Clark 2000
  Published by Parthian Books 2007
- Patrick Jones – A Ranter for the 21st Century by Phil Clark
  Published by Parthian Books 2001
- Youth Culture by Phil Clark, Western Mail 2000
- Western Mail, Funding the Arts, statement by Phil Clark 2005
- *First Impressions*, an interview for the Royal National Theatre magazine
  1997
- *Asking the Dangerous Questions*, Phil Clark 1992
- *Cardiff’s Dynamo*, Phil Clark talks to Stephen Gallagher
  Plays International June 2002
- *Stephen Gallagher in Cardiff*
  Plays International December 1999
- *Croeso i Gymru*, Alan Williams speaks to Phil Clark
  Writers Monthly 1994
- *Give us a Proper Job* by Phil Clark
  The Big Issue Cymru, May 1999
BOX THREE

Personal Artistic Work in the Year 2000

This box includes:

- The Script
- Personal Notebook
- Performance Video
- The Programme
- The CD (where applicable)
- The Press Pack
- Publicity Flyer and Image
- Marketing analysis (where applicable)
- The Radio Transmission (where applicable)

For the eight productions I directed in 2000:

- Horrible Histories – The Mad Millennium by Terry Deary
- Unprotected Sex by Patrick Jones
- Flesh and Blood by Helen Griffin
- Everything Must Go by Patrick Jones
- Pushy by Roger Williams
- We Are What We Are by Arnold Evans
- All’s Fair by Frank Vickery
- Horrible Histories – Crackers Christmas by Terry Deary

This box also includes other information pertaining to the Sherman Theatre Company productions 2000 that I did not direct:

- The Twits by Roald Dahl
- Puff the Magic Dragon by Mike Kenny
- Talking Heads by Alan Bennett
- The Elves and the Shoemakers adapted by Mike Kenny

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