

**ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS IN REPERTORY THEATRES IN ENGLAND:  
AN EVALUATION OF THE ESMÉE FAIRBAIRN FOUNDATION 'REGIONAL  
THEATRE INITIATIVE', 2002-2004**

February 2004

from a report prepared for Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

by Steven Gale and Paul Iles

The Laughing Audience

[paul.iles@laughingaudience.co.uk](mailto:paul.iles@laughingaudience.co.uk)

[www.laughingaudience.co.uk](http://www.laughingaudience.co.uk)

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<i>Sections</i>	<i>Page</i>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	1.1 Background to the 'Regional Theatre Initiative'	3
	1.2 Objectives and Conditions	4
	1.3 Brief	5
	1.4 Methodology	6
<b>2. Summary</b>	2.1 The genesis of the 'Regional Theatre Initiative'	8
	2.2 Features of the scheme overall	9
	2.3 Some findings on six out of seven theatres in England	10
	2.4 Some conclusions	12
<b>3. The RTI in preparation</b>	3.1 The selection of the theatres	14
	3.2 The selection of the directors	16
	3.3 The credentials of the seven directors	18
	3.4 On the directors' heredity	20
<b>4. The RTI in practice: the productions</b>	4.1 The selection of the plays	22
	4.2 The directors and the creative team	23
	4.3 The casting of the productions	23
	4.4 The rehearsal process	24
	4.5 The balance sheet	25
<b>5. The RTI in practice: the internships</b>	5.1 Special conditions of the internships	29
	5.2 Mentoring	30
	5.3 Tracking the directors	32
<b>6. Coda</b>		34
<b>7. Appendices</b>	7.1 Persons consulted	35
	7.2 Principal references examined	36

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background to the 'Regional Theatre Initiative'

The 'Regional Theatre Initiative' (RTI) was a strategic programme of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation intended to provide play directors with their first opportunity to direct a major production in regional producing theatres in England.

An overall fund from Arts & Heritage Grants for this scheme was £450,000.<sup>1</sup> £50,000 was awarded to seven theatres between 2001 and 2004: the Young Vic Theatre (London), Salisbury Playhouse, Sheffield Theatres, Birmingham Rep, Nottingham Playhouse, West Yorkshire Playhouse (Leeds) and the Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre.

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation programme expanded to Scotland, with the remaining £100,000 of the Foundation's allocation awarded to the Byre Theatre of St Andrews and the Dundee Rep for productions in 2004.

The Arts & Heritage Programme Director, in conjunction with the Senior Drama Officer, Arts Council England, devised the RTI in response to an initial proposal by David Lan, artistic director of the Young Vic. The scheme aimed to support the Arts Council England National Theatre Policy by (a) developing the artists and creative managers of the future, (b) creating regional distinctiveness and (c) producing a better range of high quality work.

This report is an evaluation of the RTI.

---

<sup>1</sup> Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, *Annual Review 2002*, London, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 2003, p.41.

## 1.2. Objectives and Conditions

Through their special conditions of investment to these theatres, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation trustees set their objectives for associate directors through the following special conditions that applied to each theatre:

1. Shadowing the Artistic Director on a classic play.
2. Working with the Artistic Director on programme choice and compilation bearing in mind the importance of audience development.
3. Understanding the budgeting process and working with the theatre management team.
4. Understanding the roles played by the production departments and the opportunity to develop good working relationships with people.
5. Experience of working with and directing large casts.
6. Working with the education/outreach team to gain knowledge of an integrated audience development approach.
7. An insight into marketing deadlines and planning processes.
8. Cultivating a wide range of external contacts, i.e., networking, and working with casting agents, etc.
9. Support and mentoring during the production period and advice on subsequent career paths from the Artistic Director(s).
10. Working with the theatre management to organise exchange visits with other regional theatres in the UK; the host organisation to extend invitations to key people (artistic directors, theatre managers, as well as critics and others) to view the resulting production.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Shreela Ghosh, *letter to West Yorkshire Playhouse*, London, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 13 November 2002, p.2.

### 1.3 Brief

The aims of this evaluation, as given to the authors on 19 December 2001, are to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the RTI against the objectives set for it.
- Assess the impact of the RTI on the young directors taking part.
- Assess the impact of the RTI on the participating theatres.

The evaluation is to measure:

- Process:**
- Effectiveness and appropriateness of the way in which the young directors and host theatres were selected.
  - How guidelines were used by host theatres.
  - Support for host theatres from the funders (Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Arts Council England).
  - Support for the young directors from the artistic directors and the theatres' senior management.

- Partnerships:**
- The partnerships between the funders (Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Arts Council England).
  - The partnerships between the theatres and the young directors.

Both should be evaluated against the stated aims of the partnerships and against their role/effectiveness in delivering the aims of the RTI.

- Theatres:**
- How the theatres responded to and fulfilled their role as hosts.
  - What was the impact of participating in the RTI on the theatres (including issues around their perception of the quality of work produced and its effect on their artistic and audience profiles, ways of working and sustainability of impacts).
  - How the grants were used.
  - Perceived benefits to the young directors (growth in skills, knowledge, other).

- Directors:**
- Profiles of candidates in relation to selection process.
  - Response of directors to participating in the initiative.
  - Perceived benefits.

## 1.4. Methodology

Our research methodology was developed and agreed with Shreela Ghosh at Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The main components were:

1. A conference of artistic directors and theatre managers from each theatre, hosted by the Foundation.
2. Visits to see the productions.
3. Interviews with the participating directors.
4. Interviews with the artistic directors and theatre managers.
5. The collection and scrutiny of production budgets, annual accounts, documents of control, programmes and press clippings.
6. A study of director training schemes and secondary sources.
7. The submission of interim reports to the Foundation.

We interviewed each young director and each artistic director, at least twice, before and after the Foundation-funded production. We interviewed the managers at each theatre. Everyone was happy to talk in person, and many obliged with subsequent telephone interviews and email correspondence over the two years duration of this study. We scrutinised the résumés of the young directors and the theatres' artistic directors and leaders, and their colleagues, to assess how well matched they were.

Our interviews with the young directors included questions about their general artistic and aesthetic tastes and knowledge, their attraction to directing, their early experience – especially previous productions – their hopes and ambitions, their familiarity with the genre in which they would be working, how well they knew the city in which they would be working, and, crucially, their interest in being artistic leader of a building-based theatre company in the regions. Our discussions with artistic directors and managers also noted their theatres' production philosophy and strategies for audience development, as well their own predisposition to and knowledge of their city and, further, their opinion of the management structure that best suited the theatrical purpose.

Our study relied on many people who have contributed to it, or pointed us in the right direction. We are grateful for their time.

## Schedule of principal interviews and productions seen

### Meetings with Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

1 March 2002 conference hosted by trustee Lord Rees-Mogg,  
with artistic directors and theatre managers  
30 July 2002 interview with Shreela Ghosh  
6 January 2003 progress meeting and interim reportage  
22 January 2004 interview with Shreela Ghosh and Alison Holdom

### Salisbury Playhouse

19 March 2002 interview with Douglas Rintoul  
21 March 2002 *The Duchess of Malfi*; interviews with Joanna Read and  
Rebecca Morland  
12 September 2002 *The Taming of the Shrew*  
19 September 2002 interview with Douglas Rintoul

### The Young Vic Theatre<sup>3</sup>

11 April 2002 interview with Rufus Norris  
11 April 2002 interview with David Lan  
15 April 2002 interview with Gregory Thompson  
30 January 2004 interview with Rufus Norris

### Sheffield Theatres

12 June 2002 *Small Change*, directed by Rufus Norris  
13 June 2002 interviews with Michael Grandage and Grahame Morris  
12 November 2002 *Teeth 'n' Smiles*  
13 November 2002 interview with Anna Mackmin  
15 February 2003 *Iphigenia*  
26 February 2003 *Iphigenia*; interview with Grahame Morris  
23 February 2004 interview with Michael Grandage

### Nottingham Playhouse

16 July 2002 interview with Giles Croft  
26 August 2003 interview with Paul Savage  
15 November 2003 *Othello*  
5 February 2004 interview with Giles Croft

### Birmingham Rep

26 August 2003 interview with Toby Frow  
4 October 2003 *A View From the Bridge*  
8 February 2004 interview with Toby Frow  
9 February 2004 interview with Jonathan Church

### West Yorkshire Playhouse

16 August 2002 interview with Ian Brown  
11 July 2003 *Off Camera*; interview with Femi Elufowoju  
22 November 2003 *Medea*  
1 December 2003 interview with Femi Elufowoju  
17 December: 2003 interview with Ian Brown  
13 February 2004 interview with Ian Brown

### Other main interviews

23 June 2002 William Gaskill, theatre director  
10 July 2002 Sue Higginson, National Theatre Studio  
22 November 2003 John Harrison, Director Emeritus, West Yorkshire Playhouse  
9 December 2003 Isobel Hawson, Arts Council England

---

<sup>3</sup> We were not commissioned until after the two productions at the Young Vic Theatre.

## 2. SUMMARY

### 2.1. The genesis of the 'Regional Theatre Initiative'

- 2.1.1. Following a decade of slump in the creative and financial fortunes of regional theatre, there was a large increase in government investment for drama in England. In turn, the *Arts Council's National Policy for Theatre in England*<sup>4</sup> was published in July 2000 – henceforward an optimistic outlook imbued the theatres, which, it might be supposed, was paralleled by new leadership ambitions for artistic direction by talented young theatre directors who had cold-shouldered regional theatres in the 1990s.
- 2.1.2. Following Trustees' reorganisation of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's grant awards towards a more proactive, focused strategy, a specialist Programme Director for the new Arts & Heritage programme, Shreela Ghosh, was appointed.
- 2.1.3. The Foundation's new strategic grants initiatives enabled a bespoke scheme to support the need for new and emerging artistic leadership in UK-wide theatres.
- 2.1.4. There had been a number of long-running schemes for *trainee* directors, such as the Thames Television scheme from 1958,<sup>5</sup> generally known as 'RYTDS' now run by Channel 4 as C4TDS,<sup>6</sup> an Arts Council of Great Britain scheme from 1966 and, latterly, some higher degrees in directing at universities and vocational drama schools. However, any regular scheme for apprenticing associate directors had lapsed. This post had been a full-time resident job that had once existed in most provincial repertory theatres and was the catwalk to becoming an artistic director.
- 2.1.5. David Lan, the Young Vic Theatre's newly appointed artistic director, believed one of the biggest problems in theatres to be the inability of young directors to obtain comprehensive training and opportunities to

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Arts Council of England National Policy for Theatre in England*, Arts Council of England, London, July 2000.

<sup>5</sup> *A New Pattern of Patronage, The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain*, London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1958, p.38.

<sup>6</sup> This eighteen-month course with a UK theatre is for applicants over twenty. Three bursaries are awarded annually, each for a period of one year. The annual award per trainee is £10,000, tax-free. On completion, the participating theatres are required, at their own expense, to offer the trainee a further six-month contract so that he or she might direct a production of their own, either main-house or studio. Channel 4 makes funding of £5,000 towards each production. See [www.c4tds.co.uk](http://www.c4tds.co.uk)

direct main-stage productions in an institutional theatre. He approached the Foundation for £500,000 assistance for a three-year scheme. The Foundation at first demurred, on grounds of cost and because this proposal – and his concurrent 'Direct Action Initiative' in association with the National Theatre Studio – was rooted in London. The Foundation awarded the Young Vic a 'pilot' grant of £50,000 and allocated other funds to theatres outside the capital.

- 2.1.6. Because of scant resources, theatre managements compete zealously for subsidy and the attentions of funding bodies; after considering the well-devised Young Vic proposal, the Foundation's decision to distribute £450,000 between seven theatres in England and two in Scotland fostered fairer treatment for the UK theatre profession.

## 2.2. Features of the scheme overall

- 2.2.1. Upon the nomination by Arts Council England, the Foundation selected large-scale resident theatres where they believed the artistic direction to be experienced, knowledgeable and forward-looking, and the managements supportive and relatively stable. Although other theatres could not apply to join the scheme, given the unsophisticated artistic direction and changeableness in many other regional theatres at this time there would have been few if any other managements suited to the RTI.
- 2.2.2. Arts Council England's collaborations continued with Isobel Hawson, senior drama officer, contacting a dozen talented young directors who the theatre department thought would be ambitious and ready for directing plays on the larger-scale, and becoming artistic directors of institutional theatres.
- 2.2.3. Arts Council England was mindful of two of its five aims, to invest in the creative talents of artists and individuals, and, especially, to increase opportunities for cultural diversity in the arts. Accordingly, Black and Multi-Ethnic play directors prevailed and, in England, candidates from these racial and ethnic minority backgrounds formed the majority of the directors listed by the Arts Council.
- 2.2.4. An equal opportunity objective notwithstanding, candidacy for the scheme was not advertised.
- 2.2.5. The selection and engagement of the young director was the responsibility of each theatre's artistic director.

- 2.2.6. It might be said that there was inconsistency between the Foundation inviting theatres to join the scheme, and then expecting them to interview potential candidates largely nominated by the Arts Council. It might have been preferable for theatres either to apply with a candidate in mind, or for them to apply to host a candidate from a short-list compiled by the Foundation.
- 2.2.7. Most theatres elected to go their own way and decided upon their preferred associate director intern at an early stage, based on the theatre's requirements. Often, the person had previously directed or had enjoyed an association with that theatre. All were freelance directors, of whom six were London-based, and three of these had run their own, artist-led touring company.
- 2.2.8. The choice of experienced play directors confirms an important characteristic of the RTI: that it was not a *trainee* bursary scheme.
- 2.2.9. The ultimate choices of play director by the artistic directors were vindicated: the standard of productions and critical response was generally high, and a constructive relationship between the play director and the theatre usually attended the placement.
- 2.2.10. The exception to this affinity was at West Yorkshire Playhouse; this theatre adhered reasonably closely to the guidelines and approached interviews open-mindedly. Nevertheless, the young director and theatre were mismatched; our interviews confirm that West Yorkshire Playhouse had the least suitable candidate.
- 2.2.11. They were engaged on Equity or similarly phrased freelance contracts.
- 2.2.12. The Foundation, on the Arts Council recommendation, required the young directors to have an external mentor. Only Birmingham Rep and the Salisbury Playhouse arranged this. Elsewhere, the artistic director fulfilled this function, if at all.

### **2.3. Some findings on six out of seven theatres in England**

- 2.3.1. The RTI offered the young directors important experience of selecting their play in conjunction with an artistic director. They had to consider how personal preferences suited the Company's repertoire.
- 2.3.2. The productions gave play directors the experience of working with larger casts than normal. Casting was conducted with wise counsel from the artistic director and, in some cases, the assistance of a casting

director. They also benefited greatly from collaborations with experienced set, costume, lighting and sound designers.

- 2.3.3. However, the internship did not provide the opportunity to work with better actors than those they had cast in previous productions. Actors were, arguably, no better than those in a good London fringe or profit-sharing production. With the exception of the Young Vic, leading roles were generally under cast. This was not the fault of the young director or the scheme, but represents actors' reluctance to work for low wages and subsistence, and their inclination to leave London only to work with a top director.
- 2.3.4. To fulfil the ambitions of individual directors and the needs of institutional theatres, especially the shortage of knowledgeable first-time artistic directors motivated to lead them in the 'producer-manager' dimension, the placement was supposed to have provided the young directors with an introduction to the tools required to run a theatre company overall, including financial management, fundraising, board and stakeholder relations, marketing and community involvement, education, stage and production management. These were included in the Special Conditions of the Foundation grant (p.3). We were surprised, therefore, that the young directors enjoyed, at best, only embryonic opportunities to immerse themselves in the strategic direction, management and marketing of the organisation. For instance, none had attended board meetings. Only at Sheffield Crucible Theatre was the young director thus involved; others who we interviewed continued to regard the management aspects of a resident theatre as inflictions to be avoided.
- 2.3.5. All young directors remain well disposed to the RTI in retrospect. Nevertheless, only for one person so far has the scheme developed an appetite for becoming a resident artistic director. At Sheffield after her production of *Iphigenia*, Anna Mackmin became joint associate director (with Michael Grandage) but although these posts share responsibility for play selection, casting and production, these individuals remain self-employed theatre artists who do not take ultimate executive responsibility for the full function of an artistic director-and-chief executive. Our perception is that, if anything, the other play directors were dissuaded by their experiences. At other theatres - Salisbury Playhouse and the Young Vic so far - the young director has retained an association.
- 2.3.6. Each theatre was thankful for the RTI (although the extent to which they acknowledged the scheme in print meandered). They apportioned most of the Foundation's £50,000 investment to

production expenditure, and a relatively small proportion to the young directors' fees, wages and expenses.

- 2.3.7. It might be argued that a condition of the Foundation grant should have weighted the grant towards the young directors' fees, thereby enabling a longer-term affiliation with the theatres including leadership and planning training, and other 'networking' opportunities that were part of the Foundation's Special Conditions.
- 2.3.8. Box Office receipts for the RTI productions totalled £309,275 (net of VAT) and were attended by 40,889 patrons overall (excepting Manchester). The Foundation sponsorship of £250,000 over five regional theatres represented £6.11 investment per seat sold.
- 2.3.9. The Foundation saw RTI as a series of internships, whereas the theatres principally regarded it as another production sponsorship. RTI was good for grantor and recipient, but for different reasons; and it was good for the young director but could have been better.
- 2.3.10. The aim for the RTI to develop a new cadre of artistic directors may have been too ambitious. The Foundation might now track the careers of the seven young directors to see whether any take such a resident artistic directorship in a regional theatre, where their attentions would, like the experience of senior and retired artistic directors with whom we spoke, be wholly focused on one theatre through living in the community without ambition for the stimulations of London theatre.

## **2.4. Some conclusions**

- 2.4.1. The principal achievement of the RTI was to give theatres courage to take the risk of staging a large classic play whilst giving these productions to a talented and emerging play director who might not otherwise have received the commission. The Foundation achieved what it set out to do, with great success.
- 2.4.2. We are confident that the opportunities provided to the young directors by the RTI will accrue longer-term benefit to their future work and to the theatre generally, reflecting credit upon the Foundation.
- 2.4.3. In a funding environment characterised by excessive and multiple accountabilities, theatres were grateful that the RTI gave interpretive liberty by backing the artistic directors' judgement, along with a minimum of red tape.

- 2.4.4. The RTI forged an unusual and profitable alliance between a private trust and a public-sector arts funding and development agency, but the Foundation may have unintentionally conformed to Arts Council England criteria. The Foundation might also have sought advice on the habituation of associate directors and the vital element they have played in regional theatre, from, for example, seasoned and disinterested artistic directors and managers.
- 2.4.5. The RTI as a scheme was handicapped by a lack of project management: if the Foundation is to develop more strategic initiatives, the parameters might be more precisely designed and better defined in the letter of offer and monitored progressively.
- 2.4.6. The RTI may have been too ambitious in seeking to provide opportunities for talented, emerging play directors *and* addressing the issue of directors' willingness to become artistic directors. The Foundation might encourage the interns to apply for fellowships with arts leadership and programmes. This type of development is outside the RTI, but it emphasises the correspondent need for management training for theatre directors. Although it is not always easy to decide where the role of artistic director begins and where it ends, regional theatres need artistic directors who, besides being the creator of the art on stage, understand the business and political side of the enterprise. We note that play direction is not the only route to artistic direction: three of the six artistic leaders at these theatres progressed to their posts after careers in other theatre disciplines, whether as actor, literary manager or playwright.
- 2.4.7. Because the internships at Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre, the Byre Theatre St Andrews and Dundee Rep are underway in 2004, the Foundation may wish to address these theatres' implementation of the Special Conditions pertaining to the interns' exposure to theatre management.

### 3. THE RTI IN PREPARATION

#### 3.1. The selection of the theatres

The Young Vic Theatre's 'Direct Action' initiative occurred in autumn 2001, by which time five regional theatres had been invited to participate in the 'Regional Theatre Initiative' and to submit proposals to the Foundation for support to the tune of £50,000 each.<sup>7</sup> These were the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Nottingham Playhouse, Salisbury Playhouse, Sheffield Theatres and the New Victoria Theatre, Newcastle under Lyme. The New Victoria Theatre subsequently withdrew for reasons unconnected with the scheme and, later, was succeeded by the Birmingham Rep and the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester.

The RTI was not publicly advertised. The theatres were short listed by the Arts Council England theatre department and approached because of ACE recommendation. Essential criteria were that the theatres possessed the capacity to stage large-scale work, that the managements were supportive and relatively stable, and that the artistic direction be experienced and appropriate to a scheme of this kind.

The theatres, or their artistic directors,<sup>8</sup> had experience of hosting trainee directors under either an Arts Council scheme or a C4TDS scheme. Giles Croft, for example, enjoyed special repute as a mentor at Nottingham Playhouse and previously at the Palace Theatre, Watford, and Ian Brown of the West Yorkshire Playhouse had hosted several bursary winners at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh. Sheffield Theatres and Birmingham Rep had C4TDS trainees at this time. Many of the resident artistic directors, who had been in their current posts for relatively short periods, had personal experience of one or another of these schemes. For example, Joanna Read had been a C4TDS trainee at Sheffield Crucible and the Young Vic, and Richard Baron, associate director of the Nottingham Playhouse, whom Paul Savage assisted on *Mary Rose* (J.M. Barrie, 1920) at Nottingham as part of the RTI, had received two bursaries from the Scottish Arts Council, firstly as an assistant director at the Royal Lyceum Theatre Company, Edinburgh and, later, as associate director of the Dundee Rep. All had incisive experience of the pros and cons of theatre director schemes.

---

<sup>7</sup> At the Young Vic, the scheme was also supported by a grant from the Tara Ulemek Foundation (£10,000), financial support from Nicholas Hytner and a very generous anonymous donor.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Grandage is associate director of Sheffield Theatres. For the purposes of this study, we use the appellation 'artistic director' to mean the person who determines the theatre programme and selection of artists.

Arts Council England counsels – fortified by the knowledge of the senior drama officer in particular – were invaluable in the planning stages of the RTI. We have no misgivings about the absence of public advertisement, despite the vogue for open competition. The RTI was designed to provide a very specific opportunity to gifted and instructed individuals and it is right that the Foundation should have sought competent advice on which were the cardinal theatre companies to support these objectives. RTI was designed to support exemplary theatre-makers, and their promise might have awaited prolonged discovery had the scheme been more 'accessible'.

It should also be noted that, looked at from the perspective of what the RTI was trying to achieve, there were, at this time, not that many theatres to choose between. Once those that were ineligible for one reason or another were discounted, either because they were then undergoing reorganisation (such as Derby Playhouse) or the impending hiatus of rebuilding (such as Leicester Haymarket) or did not then have a resident artistic leader (such as Bristol Old Vic) or were pursuing an artistic policy so singular that it would preclude providing a suitable opportunity (such as Northern Stage at Newcastle Playhouse), or were in the throes of 'stabilisation' or 'recovery' because of looming insolvency, the theatres were virtually self-selecting.

Nevertheless, the theatres were a well-aimed range of medium and large houses. Firstly, they offered different forms for the young directors' experience, whether thrust stage (Sheffield), proscenium (Birmingham and Nottingham), 'open proscenium' (Salisbury), flexible stage (the Courtyard at Leeds) or theatre in the round (Manchester).

Secondly, the choice of theatres was appropriate because of their artistic purpose. Under chief executive Grahame Morris, Sheffield Theatres had enjoyed a period of creative oomph and financial stability, and, following the appointment of Michael Grandage as associate director, several large-scale classical productions in the Crucible Theatre (980 seats) had attracted good attendance and national media acclaim. During the previous decade, the West Yorkshire Playhouse had gained a reputation for producing a wide range of work, new and classical, in a popular context in its two auditoria, the Quarry (756 seats) and the Courtyard (356 seats), as well as blazing a trail in community, education and social inclusion partnerships. Joanna Read's appointment as artistic director at the Salisbury Playhouse (517 seats) had revived that theatre's inclination for canny, progressive programming in its main house and studio. The arrival of the skilled and experienced management team of Jonathan Church and Stuart Rogers heralded a renewed optimism and commitment to producing successful large-scale classics, old and new, in the implacable expanses of Birmingham Rep (824 seats). At Nottingham Playhouse (766 seats), Giles Croft had skilfully knitted together an eclectic range of work into a coherent artistic programme. The Playhouse

was also one of the organisers of the Eclipse conference, investigating the existence of racial discrimination in the theatre, in 2001.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2 The selection of the directors

For the inaugural 'Direct Action' project, the Young Vic Theatre selected directors from those that had attended courses or placements at the National Theatre Studio, situated further along the same street as the theatre, and with which the Young Vic had previously collaborated on projects. David Lan and Sue Higginson, the Head of the Studio, compared notes on young (and not-so-young) directors that had produced work of note either in fringe and studio theatres in London or on tour or at the Studio itself to draw up a list of possible candidates for interview. They were seeking directors who had consistently produced work of quality and ambition and who might, in happier financial times, have already graduated to a larger stage, and who possessed the temperament and commitment necessary to make the 'step-up' to producing work for the Young Vic's main theatre (484 seats).

The contribution of the National Theatre Studio should not be underestimated. Since its foundation by Peter Gill in 1984, the Studio has been an invaluable breeding ground and meeting place for theatre artists, providing a 'laboratory' where new work is developed and skills honed away from the pressure of public performance and the demand for product. During the last five years alone, several hundred directors had worked at the Studio, to say nothing of the number of actors, writers and designers that had met, exchanged ideas and experimented away from the glare of the footlights.

'Direct Action' declared the following aims:

1. To spot the best of the rising generation of young directors.
2. To offer a springboard opportunity to new talent.
3. To cross-fertilize with the older generation of established directors who would be passing on their knowledge and support.
4. To begin creating a new generation of directors who will also be part of an ethos of supporting younger colleagues.
5. To offer the public fresh approaches to classics that need re-evaluation, re-thinking or simply a timely revival.

We note the emphasis on developing theatre artists.

Once the two young directors, Rufus Norris and Gregory Thompson, had been selected, the process of selecting the two plays that they would direct

---

<sup>9</sup> Arts Council of England, East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association and Nottingham Playhouse, *Eclipse Report: developing strategies to combat racism in theatre*, London, Arts Council of England, 2001.

began. The emphasis was on finding two plays that the young directors wanted to direct, that worked well together as a mini-season, that had not been seen in London for many years, and the staging of which would make specific technical demands on the director.

The RTI sought to replicate this process via the good offices of Arts Council England. The ACE theatre department assisted the theatres' selection of the young directors by producing a list of a dozen talented emerging directors who it was thought would gain from the RTI, and who had expressed interest in the scheme. The RTI was not publicly advertised.

The artistic directors were required to meet at least three candidates; most made a point of seeing more. They were also at liberty to include directors who were already known to them.

In compiling its list, the Arts Council was mindful of two of its five aims in particular, to invest in the creative talents of artists and individuals, and, especially, to increase opportunities for cultural diversity in the arts. Accordingly, Black and Multi-Ethnic directors prevailed and directors from these ethnic minority backgrounds formed the majority of those listed by the Arts Council.<sup>10</sup>

Two of the artistic directors were conscious that they were being guided towards ethnic minority candidates and another was under the impression that the RTI was a scheme for ethnic minority candidates only. It must be emphasised that none had any objection to this. On the contrary, they were clear that this was entirely consistent with their own theatres' policy. However, we are not convinced that this is what the Foundation originally intended.

The artistic director ultimately decided the selection and engagement of the play director for the RTI. One significant difference from 'Direct Action' was that most of the artistic directors required candidates to nominate plays for possible production as part of the selection process. The artistic directors made every effort to travel to see candidates' work before reaching a final decision.

In the end, many theatres opted for a play director who was known to them, either because they had previously directed or had enjoyed an association with that theatre, or its artistic director had already seen and noted the play directors' work prior to embarking on the RTI selection process.

---

<sup>10</sup> These young directors were: AJ Chabra, Afia Nkrumah, Chris Meads, David Tse, Dawn Walton, Femi Elufowoju Jnr, Karena Johnson, Lawrence Evans, Natalie Wilson, Neran Persaud, Paul Savage, Steven Luckie.

The seven selected directors ranged in age from 27 to 39. All were freelance directors, and three had experience of running their own, artist-led company. Of the seven, six were based in London, six were male and one female, four were white, two were black and one categorised himself as 'other'. With one exception, we were not told about their sexual orientation.

It is difficult to detect a representative trend from such a small sample, but we remain confident that the artistic directors approached the selection process seriously and with a reasonably open mind. They did not, to adapt Giles Croft's memorable phrase in the Eclipse Report, 'just use their mates'.<sup>11</sup>

### **3.3. The credentials of the seven directors**

These people were matched to the theatres:

#### **Rufus Norris: The Young Vic Theatre, London**

Rufus Norris trained as an actor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and subsequently founded Wink Productions, a London-based new writing touring company of which he remains artistic director, and which had presented work at the Young Vic Studio. He later trained as an assistant director at the Royal Court Theatre. Work immediately prior to his selection for the Young Vic's 'Direct Action' initiative included productions at the Soho Theatre, The Young Vic Studio and the Royal Court Theatre.

#### **Gregory Thompson: The Young Vic Theatre, London**

Gregory Thompson read mathematics and philosophy at the London School of Economics and in 1999 was the Director on Attachment at the National Theatre Studio. He is the artistic director of AandBC Theatre Company that specialises in site-specific theatre productions, which, prior to his selection for the Young Vic's 'Direct Action' initiative, had included *The Tempest* at Somerset House, *The Tale that Wags the Dog* at the Purcell Room and *Pericles* in Canterbury Castle.

#### **Douglas Rintoul: Salisbury Playhouse**

Douglas Rintoul read drama and theatre arts at the University of Birmingham, graduating in 1996. His early career included directing work at

---

<sup>11</sup> Arts Council of England, East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association and Nottingham Playhouse, *Eclipse Report*, op.cit., p.18.

the Midlands Arts Centre and the Edinburgh Festival fringe and as administrator for Theatre de Complicité. He had participated in a National Theatre Studio young directors' programme and, immediately prior to selection for the RTI, was the recipient of an eighteen-month C4TDS bursary at Salisbury Playhouse, where he was assistant director on six productions and directed another six, mostly in the Playhouse studio.

### **Anna Mackmin: Sheffield Theatres**

Anna Mackmin trained as an actor at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. For many years she ran her own clothing design business. Her first work as a director was a production of Charlotte Jones' *Airswimming* at the Battersea Arts Centre, after which she directed Jones' *In Flame* at the Bush Theatre and a revival of Andrea Dunbar's *The Arbor* at the Sheffield Crucible. She has rapidly gained a reputation as a first-rate director and as a sensitive and intelligent new writing specialist with further productions at the Royal Court Theatre and in London's West End.

### **Paul Savage: Nottingham Playhouse**

Paul Savage trained as an actor at the University of Cape Town Drama School. Early acting work in England included seasons with the Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich, the Unicorn Theatre and the West Yorkshire Playhouse. He has also worked extensively as a musical director. Prior to selection for the RTI, Mr Savage had received an Arts Council England directing bursary at the Midlands Arts Centre and the New Victoria Theatre, Newcastle under Lyne. He had also recently directed for Roundabout, the Nottingham Playhouse Theatre in Education company.

### **Femi Elufowoju Jnr: West Yorkshire Playhouse**

Femi Elufowoju Jnr trained as an actor at Bretton Hall, graduating in 1990. Early work included roles with the Oxford Stage Company, the Royal Court Theatre, the National Theatre and the West Yorkshire Playhouse. His career as a theatre director began in 1996 at the Southwark Playhouse after which he received a Regional Theatre Young Directors attachment with the Theatre Royal, Stratford East. He later formed his own company, Tiata Fahodzi, which focuses on touring productions that represent legacies stemming from Africa and the Diaspora and on the development of new writing sourced from the experiences of African emigrants. More recently, Mr Elufowoju had directed a co-production with the New York-based Sammy Davis Jr Foundation and Patrick Marber's *Dealers Choice* at Salisbury Playhouse.

## **Toby Frow: Birmingham Rep**

Toby Frow read English literature at University College, Oxford graduating in 1998. At Oxford he directed several productions including *Deathwatch*, *Volpone* and *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love*, and his early career was typical of many aspiring Oxbridge graduates: a combination of London fringe work (Southwark Playhouse, Battersea Arts Centre), directors' attachment at the National Theatre Studio, and work as an assistant director to Sir Richard Eyre on Nicholas Wright's *Vincent in Brixton*. In 2001-02, he was Carlton Resident Assistant Director at the Donmar Warehouse Theatre, London.

### **3.5. On the directors' heredity**

The seven selected candidates fall into three overlapping categories: three of them, Messrs Norris, Thompson, and Elufowoju, each had extensive experience of running their own – very different – small-scale, artist-led companies for several years as well as enjoying periods of attachment with building-based companies in London. A further two of the selected directors, Mr Savage and Ms Mackmin, belong to the ancestral category of actor-turned-director and had developed their craft for many years as 'jobbing' actors before seeking to realise their metier as a director. (Messrs Norris and Elufowoju had also worked, more briefly, as actors). There can be no doubt that the above-mentioned five had 'earned their spurs' and were in their different ways ready to undertake the challenge of directing large-scale work. As one of them remarked to us in interview, 'I am 39 years old and just last week I paid my first tax bill'.

The youngest two of the seven directors, Messrs Rintoul and Frow, arrived at the RTI through the more 'traditional' route of university to fringe work to trainee bursary at a mainstream theatre. Both are prodigious networkers. So much so, in fact, that we felt it might have been more appropriate for them to be ambassadors on behalf of their host theatres rather than the other way round. Mr Frow had recently completed a year as an assistant director at the Donmar Warehouse in London and Mr Rintoul had recently been a C4TDS trainee director at Salisbury Playhouse. In our interim report in November 2002, we expressed tentative reservations about Salisbury's choice of Mr Rintoul on the grounds of additionality as we felt that he had already fulfilled many of the Foundation's Special Conditions during this previous residency. To some extent, we still feel this, though our view has been ameliorated by the realisation that many of the selected theatres and directors took a breezily cavalier approach to these requirements, as will be discussed later.

The selection process for 'Direct Action' was determined first and foremost by the desire to provide an opportunity to two deserving individuals and then

deciding exactly what this opportunity might entail and how best to sell it to the public. However, for the RTI it is clear that what remained uppermost in the artistic directors' minds during the selection process, understandably perhaps, was the needs of their theatres. The process was from the beginning more pragmatic. Play choice was discussed as part of the process (one candidate was told that the choice had to be a 'syllabus play') rather than after selection. The directors were selected because of the artistic directors' confidence in their experience and ability to 'deliver the goods'. This choice of experienced directors confirms an important characteristic of the RTI: that it was not a *trainee* bursary scheme. From the point of view of the theatres, the scheme was first and foremost a production sponsorship. As such, the RTI was doomed to succeed.

## 4. THE RTI IN PRACTICE: THE PRODUCTIONS

### 4.1 The selection of the plays

The productions by these young directors were staged between September 2001 and December 2003. The original brief from the Foundation was that each of the regional theatres should stage a large-scale classic play. This was influenced by David Lan's rationale behind the revivals of *Andorra* (Max Frisch, 1961) and *Afore Night Come* (David Rudkin, 1960) at the Young Vic, that they were intrinsically 'theatrical' modern classics that had been unjustly neglected (having not been seen in London for thirty years) and also by Foundation Trustees' conviction that, because of pusillanimity engendered by financial constraints, the regional theatres had been starved of epic theatre suited to their large stages. The brief for large-scale productions was also influenced by fear of a generation of theatregoers coming to associate their local theatre with work that was small, domestic or mediocre.

This brief sired productions of *Othello* (William Shakespeare, 1604) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (William Shakespeare, c.1594), two Greek tragedies – *Iphigenia* (Euripides, c.414BC) and *Medea* (Euripides, c.431BC) in contemporary translations by Edna O'Brien (a world premiere commissioned by Sheffield, 2003) and Alistair Elliot (1991) respectively – and *A View from the Bridge* (Arthur Miller, 1955). We have no disagreement with these selections. All enjoy classic status and are part of the theatrical canon. All are substantial, expensive plays to produce which the participating theatres can legitimately claim they would be unable to stage without the Foundation's support. Indeed, at Sheffield, where the Greek production included a large 'community' chorus of young people and where the thrust stage is so suited to this oeuvre, *Iphigenia* was the first such play performed since 1971, when *The Persians* (Aeschylus, 470BC) was staged in the Crucible's opening season; this reawakening is in itself another commendable aspect of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation investment.

We are sceptical about the Manchester Royal Exchange choice of *Six Degrees of Separation* (John Guare, 1991) which, fine play though it may be, does not really conform to the Foundation's definition of large-scale 'classic' as expected by this scheme.

A number of factors influenced the process of play selection. The theatres were required to agree the choice with the Foundation, they were naturally anxious to select something that sensibly suited their overall programme and policy and might further develop their audiences' tastes, and it should be something that the play director was keen to direct. Some of the artistic directors required candidates to make a case at interview for choosing a particular play. This was an intelligent strategy. The inevitable negotiating process that ensued was itself a valuable experience to the play directors,

opening their eyes to the practical decision-making process involved in programming a building-based theatre and the need to marry their personal ambitions with the perceived needs and 'brand' of the theatre. Most were sympathetic to this process. Indeed two of the play directors separately made the wise observation to us in interview that 'many people make the mistake of thinking that if they become an artistic director they will be able to choose all the plays they have always wanted to direct', though these play directors were admittedly citing this as a reason for not wanting to be the artistic director of a provincial theatre.

#### **4.2. The directors and the creative team**

Most of the young directors selected highly experienced set, costume and lighting designers with whom they could collaborate, sometimes at the insistence of the theatre. The play directors were generally amenable to this process; indeed several of them already knew their chosen designer personally, or at the very least admired their work. Where they had not worked with the designer before, some theatres insisted that their young director meet and select one from three or four experienced designers that had previously worked in their theatre. This was a sensible strategy as it meant that the creative team did not expend energy 'reinventing the wheel'. Coupled with composer and choreographer collaborations, this work was one of the most tangible 'learning experiences' that the scheme afforded the young directors, as well as incorporating some promise of production quality for the theatres. The directors profited by working with vastly experienced resident production teams at the host theatres; they observed the physical realisation of their ideas through the crafts of the resident technical and production teams.

Generally, the results were impressive, producing design and staging that was mature, clear and well judged. Collaborations were positive, knowledgeable and productive. All designers with whom we discussed the scheme praised their directors for their preparation, clarity of thought and understanding of the text. One even went so far as to say that he 'didn't know the director was on a bursary'. Most would happily work with the director again. Moreover, one already has.

#### **4.3. The casting of the productions**

For most of the young directors, the casting process seems to have progressed smoothly, or rather no less smoothly than might ordinarily be the case. Most had the benefit of casting assistance, whether from in-house staff or freelance professionals. Only one director complained of feeling insufficiently supported by his theatre. This is not to say that the process was necessarily

easy, but we detected no sense that it had been any more difficult for these 'rookie' directors than it might be for a more experienced or better-known director. Most suffered the frustration of offering a role to their first-choice actor who then kept them waiting for an affirmative or negative reply or else dropping out at a late stage, by which time the second choice was no longer available, and so on. Theatre has always been the poor relation to the film media and this happens all the time; the experience was all grist to the mill for a young director. Birmingham Rep's play director, Toby Frow, spoke warmly of the support and advice he received from his mentor, Sir Richard Eyre, on the casting of *A View from the Bridge*.

The RTI's main aim was to give the young directors the chance to direct a production with a larger cast than may have been the case before, and to provide the concomitant experience of staging work on a larger scale and in a bigger theatre. All this was achieved, sometimes with resounding success. Only the West Yorkshire Playhouse production of *Medea* perhaps did not achieve an expected level of competence. What the RTI rarely provided the directors, however, was the opportunity to work with *better* actors than hitherto. This betrays an inevitable limitation of the original brief, for most of these classic plays contain leading roles that are extremely challenging and complex, demanding performances of great charisma, energy and technical proficiency, following long preparation and rehearsal. Often, the actors seemed to lack training in and experience of classical speech. With the exception of the Young Vic, these leading roles felt undercast and under rehearsed. This was not the fault of the young director or the scheme, but is a consequence of the curtailment of ensemble opportunities in today's discontinuous acting companies, as well as reflection of actors' reluctance to leave London for the low pay, domestic inconvenience and exiguous profile garnered from a regional theatre production.

#### **4.4. The rehearsal process**

It is often said that after finding the 'key' to a production's interpretation and style through good preparation, textual analysis, attention to detail and casting, the most difficult part of a director's task is handling the actors in rehearsal. The extent to which the young directors fused a large cast in only a few weeks rehearsal distinguished the majority. Each director had their methods, and our interviews with actors and artistic directors indicated that the majority fostered cooperation. These directors expressed their conception of the play to the actors in an intelligent manner. The actors experienced clear, confident and diplomatic direction. In turn, the directors helped their actors to fulfil their individual and collective potential. Rehearsals proceeded with the customary give-and-take of collaborative creativity.

Only two significant problems arose, both of which were eventually dealt with efficiently by the theatres' managements: at Nottingham Playhouse, Mr Savage and the rest of his company experienced great difficulties with his first-choice Othello, an actor sadly known for unreasonable behaviour, not least toward his fellow actors. Mr Savage was fully aware of this actor's reputation when he cast him in the leading role but was confident that the actor's behaviour would be moderated by their existing friendship. His confidence was misplaced. When the situation was deemed to have become intolerable, the Playhouse moved smartly to replace the leading man with a substitute known to Giles Croft and who had previously played Othello elsewhere.

At West Yorkshire Playhouse, the difficulty that arose was more due to the demeanour of the director himself. Put at its simplest, Mr Elufowoju failed to substantiate his reading of *Medea* from the planning stage to the rehearsal room. While the production's designer retained his faith in Mr Elufowoju's interpretation throughout the preparation process, the cast lacked confidence in their director almost from the outset. This inability to communicate his vision to his company is doubly mystifying given that Mr Elufowoju trained as an actor and had worked solidly as a performer before turning to directing. After a couple of weeks' attrition, the company went to the artistic director to protest, one actor left the production to be replaced by the director, and Susan Stern, an experienced voice coach, was engaged as associate director to steer the production through to opening night.

Notwithstanding these episodes, the theatres were not misguided in selecting these two candidates; the problems could not have been foreseen at the interview stage. This suggests that in the ambiguous process of engaging any artist, those artistic directors who had a candidate in mind from acquaintance with their work, often made the most appropriate choice.

#### **4.5. The balance sheet**

For the purpose of the Foundation's audit trail, each theatre supplied it with copies of annual accounts, yearly estimates, production budgets and results, receipts, attendances and other data, which we also received. Foundation investments were specifically contributions to the costs of the young directors' 'training period' and production costs of the chosen play. In the context of the five regional theatres' overall business, the Foundation investments of £50,000 passed through theatres with a range of turnover from the Salisbury Playhouse at £1.89m, Nottingham Playhouse at £3.30m, Birmingham Rep at £4.45m, West Yorkshire Playhouse £5.02m and Sheffield Theatres at £5.79m.

Expectations of box office income for the Foundation-sponsored attractions were correspondingly varied. Nevertheless, most productions were

proportionately well patronised, and some greatly so. Although the theatres' formats for precise information and their means of allocating expenditures were non-uniform, and the quality of data sometimes wanting, we have attempted to interpret these entrails consistently, or at least accentuate their conspicuous characteristics.

### **Nottingham Playhouse**

The informative statistical and financial profile supplied by Nottingham Playhouse underscores the exceptionality of *Othello* for this theatre. The production was their highest attended Shakespeare play in three years – 11,470 people attended the 21 performances over three weeks – exceeding the patronage of other, more 'popular' Shakespeare plays *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (9,300 seats sold in 2000) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (9,942 seats sold in 2002). In addition, more theatregoers saw *Othello* than any of the other six Nottingham Playhouse productions in 2003. The 81 per cent capacity result underlines the resurgence of classic play attendance; this theatre is well on the way to emulating the astonishing 100 per cent paid attendance at its 1967 production of *Othello*, when 20,683 patrons attended the longer four-week run of 27 performances.<sup>12</sup> Net Box Office income for the 2003 *Othello* was £70,948. After deducting the assigned wages, production, running and marketing expenditure of £103,185, the show made a loss of £32,237 (before core subsidy and general expenditure allocation). Their Summary of Account allocated £47,500 of the Foundation's sponsorship to this production, including £4,681 director's fee; the remaining £2,500 was earmarked to the fees for the young director's preceding work at Nottingham Playhouse.

### **Birmingham Rep**

The production of *A View from the Bridge* was given for 26 performances over four weeks; 10,219 paying patrons attended (49 per cent of capacity), and receipts were £84,933, falling short of the budget of £91,052 by £6,119. This theatre included programme sales commission of £3,028, and £30,000 from co-production income in its delineated income total of £141,635.<sup>13</sup> After

---

<sup>12</sup> 'Playhouse Repertoire', *Nottingham Playhouse 1963-1968*, Nottingham, Nottingham Theatre Trust, 1969, p.11. This production directed by Noel William included the theatre's director John Neville as Iago.

<sup>13</sup> The co-production was part of a simultaneous exchange with West Yorkshire Playhouse, which produced *The Madness of King George III* (Alan Bennett, 1992). The Leeds production was directed by Rachel Kavanaugh, associate director of Birmingham Rep. Interpretation of this account is therefore complicated by the sharing of the rehearsal and production expenditure with Leeds; the two theatres were equal partners on two productions, further enabling Birmingham to create a production which, in ordinary co-production arrangements, they might not otherwise afford.

deducting the assigned wages, production, running and marketing expenditure of £162,329, the show made a loss of £20,694 (before core subsidy and general expenditure allocation). The amount of Foundation sponsorship allocated or budgeted to the costs of the young director was £17,560 (£6,000 fee and expenses for *A View from the Bridge*; £8,560 fee and expenses for his assistant directorship on *The David Hare Trilogy*; £3,000 for planning and other programming fees). This theatre budgeted £1,750 for mentoring fees and expenses.

### **Salisbury Playhouse**

At Salisbury Playhouse, the Foundation's other Shakespeare sponsorship, *The Taming of the Shrew*, was staged for 26 performances over four weeks. 7,850 people attended the play (58 per cent capacity), which grossed £63,838, falling short of the budget of £65,000 by only £1,162. After deducting the assigned wages, production, running and marketing expenditure of £85,066 (budget £89,614), the show made a loss of £21,228 (before core subsidy and general expenditure allocation). In the year ended 31 March 2003 (in which the Foundation's grant was wholly apportioned) this theatre made a net surplus of £49,083. The amount of Foundation sponsorship allocated to the costs of the young director was £6,444 (£4,300 fee and expenses for *The Taming of the Shrew*; £2,144 fee and expenses for his assistant directorship on *The Duchess of Malfi* in 2002).

### **Sheffield Theatres**

The production of *Iphigenia* was given for 22 performances over three weeks, with 6,098 people attending (28 per cent of capacity). Receipts were £43,367, falling short of the budget by £12,000. After deducting the direct production and running costs of £122,000 (budget £130,000), the show made a loss of £78,633 (before core subsidy and general expenditure allocation). The £50,000 sponsorship was not itemised into specific investments, although the director's fee of £4,500 was included in the production budget. At Sheffield, the materiality of the Foundation's investment might be said to have been the most decisive, because the year's work overall resulted in the first deficit in six years, of approximately £70,000.

### **West Yorkshire Playhouse**

The production of *Medea* was given for 34 performances over five weeks; 5,252 paying patrons attended (44 per cent of capacity), and receipts were

£46,189, falling short of the budget by £23,502. After deducting the assigned wages, production and marketing expenditure of £94,627, (budget £110,468) the show made a loss of £48,438 (before core subsidy and general expenditure allocation). The £50,000 sponsorship was allocated as £40,000 to production costs, and £10,000 to the young director's costs for the entire affiliation. This production was staged during the financial year ending 31 March 2004, so at the time of writing, the year's overall result is unknown.

The financial results for these five regional theatres confirm that, inter alia, theatres used the Foundation sponsorship for the purposes awarded. No theatres used the money to abate accumulated deficits; production budgets were responsibly controlled with no exorbitant superfluities on the part of the directors reported by the theatre managers.

In the English regional theatres, excepting Manchester, a total of 40,889 theatregoers attended the RTI productions. Box office receipts totalled £309,275. With an average ticket price paid of £7.56 (net of VAT), Foundation sponsorship of £250,000 represented an investment of £6.11 per patron.

For those theatres recently unaccustomed to staging large classic plays, the financial results derived from the Foundation's sponsorship should inspire them to sustain work at this scale in future repertoire selection. From an audience-development perspective, the RTI money encouraged the theatres to take the chance to stage these large-scale plays; theatres are now sufficiently emboldened by the experience to stage another next year. For example, Nottingham Playhouse is planning a production of *Macbeth* (William Shakespeare, 1610) in 2005, reuniting the director Mr Savage with his lead actor from *Othello*.

## **5. THE RTI IN PRACTICE: THE INTERNSHIPS**

### **5.1. Special conditions of the internships**

In an effort to develop the creative managers of the future, the RTI sought to introduce the participating directors to the range of competencies required of the artistic leader of a resident theatre. These included working with the management team on the setting and monitoring of budgets, developing an understanding of the work of the production departments, working with the education and outreach teams, and gaining an insight into marketing and planning processes.

In practice, however, the involvement of the young directors in these activities was, at best, patchy. It was largely determined by pre-existing interests and involvement. For example, Mr Savage had previously directed with 'Roundabout', the Nottingham Playhouse TIE company, and so was keen to be actively involved in the creation of that company's companion piece to *Othello*, *Good Iago*. Sheffield Theatres similarly incorporated components of Anna Mackmin's rehearsal diary into its splendid online resource pack on *Iphigenia*.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, as a general rule, the more mainstream the director's interests and background, the more likely they were to see education work as second-rank to their main activity and to enthusiastically entrust this to the resident education team.

Similarly, the inconsistency between the theatres' necessarily advanced planning cycle and the relative brevity of the play directors' internships meant that in most cases the directors' involvement with marketing and planning deadlines was largely restricted to observing these functions speed by, shortly after their arrival at the host theatre. The exceptions tended to be directors who had previously worked at their host theatre, such as Mr Rintoul at Salisbury Playhouse, and who therefore already knew how the system and timescales worked.

Generally, these freelance directors preferred to confine their involvement in the budgeting process to the impact it would have on their own production, if at all, and even here they often found that the production estimates had been finalised long before they arrived. Nevertheless, two directors did feel compelled to argue for reworking of the production budget in order to increase the cast size by one more actor as they felt corners had been cut a little too prematurely in the first budget. In many ways, this neatly sums up the young directors' main experience of working in these large, complex buildings: they discovered how such institutions function by trial and error. They learned by having to fight their corner rather than by having everything neatly laid out for them in advance. Given the competitive nature of the theatre profession, perhaps this is the best training.

---

<sup>14</sup> See [www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/education/productions/iphigenia/index.shtml](http://www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/education/productions/iphigenia/index.shtml)

Another condition of the scheme was that the directors should shadow the artistic director on a classic play prior to their own production. Not all theatres provided this opportunity. Where they did the directors complained about the need to fulfil it. They regarded it as demeaning and unnecessary and felt that the experience they already possessed had taken them beyond the point where this might have been helpful.

We are inclined to agree. It is important to remember that the RTI was targeted at experienced play directors with the intention of providing them with an overdue opportunity to graduate to a larger stage. The requirement to shadow another director is better suited to an assistant director bursary programme and represents an incorporation of what happens in existing bursary schemes that was ill matched with the aims of the RTI.

We suggest that time and money expended fulfilling this inessential requirement would have been better spent on a coordinated programme of assimilation and acquaintance with activity specific to the running of a building-based theatre company. Devoting prescribed periods to all theatre departments, briefings with marketing agencies, confronting budgets and strategic business planning, attending board meetings, encountering sponsors, and exposure to the political economy of local authorities and the Arts Council, would all have been invaluable for learning about the responsibilities of the artistic director-as-producer. Furthermore, had this dimension included the arrangement of exchange visits with other regional theatres, another special condition of the internship would have been fulfilled. We note that, in general, it was those directors explicitly mentored by the artistic director who received the most thorough internship.

## **5.2. Mentoring**

A condition of the RTI investment was that an external mentor should be appointed, the choice of person being agreed between the host theatre and the director, and that money should be set aside from the Foundation's award to pay for this. The mentor's function was to give unbiased advice to the play director if sought and to provide critical judgements to the director.

One of the Young Vic Theatre's intrinsic commitments to the young directors that participated in the 'Direct Action' project was that David Lan would mentor each director through the entire cycle, from play selection to creative preparation to technical rehearsals and run-throughs. He was resident at the theatre and available but did not attend the two directors' rehearsal periods continuously. Instead, he offered support and notes whilst keeping an eye on progress, in order that the eventual production would be produced with the audience in mind.

The Foundation's Programme Director, Arts & Heritage, original proposal to the Arts & Heritage group in March 2001 envisaged that the artistic directors of the nominated theatres would act as mentors to the 'young apprentices'. However, Esmée Fairbairn-Arts Council England joint guidelines issued in August 2001 stated that an outside mentor should be agreed and would be paid the sum of £250 plus expenses.

The appointment of a mentor is a condition of the majority of Arts Council training bursaries and it comes as no surprise that this should be recommended to the Foundation. We are aware that it is the sincerely held belief of the Arts Council's senior drama officer in particular that an outside mentor provides an essential sounding board for ideas and potential shoulder to cry on for an inexperienced practitioner away from the commotions of practical theatre-making.

However, only two theatres, Salisbury Playhouse and Birmingham Rep, appointed external mentors, Anthony Clark (the artistic director of Hampstead Theatre), and Sir Richard Eyre (former director of the National Theatre) respectively, and of these only one actually attended the production. When asked about this, the other young directors either claimed ignorance of this requirement or assumed that it was something for which the theatre took responsibility, either by appointing someone that the theatre considered appropriate or by virtue of the artistic director assuming that role, as happened at Sheffield, for example. The artistic directors likewise tended to assume that it was for the play director to appoint someone of their own choosing and that it was not for the artistic director to intervene.

In the cases of Salisbury and Birmingham, Messrs Rintoul and Frow already knew their mentor from previous collaborations. Contact during production was minimal. Mr Rintoul met Mr Clark twice: they discussed the production before rehearsals began and again several months later after Mr Clark had seen the show. Mr Frow mined Sir Richard's encyclopaedic knowledge of actors several times by telephone and email while casting his production, but Sir Richard did not see the production. Both young directors cheerfully conceded that the most useful feature of the mentoring condition was the networking opportunity that it presented.

On balance, we feel that Shreela Ghosh's first instinct was correct. Again, we should remember that this scheme was targeted not at trainees but specifically at experienced play directors who, the theatre world being what it is, already possessed - or in the cases of Messrs Rintoul and Frow were in the process of energetically acquiring - address books chock-full of contacts, confidantes and fellow-gossips to whom they would turn if and when the going got tough. Why arbitrarily select someone that the director does not know to provide a shoulder to cry on? Moreover, with the future in mind,

would Mr Frow, for example, really have wanted to alert Sir Richard Eyre to problems that he might be experiencing in rehearsal? Somehow, we doubt it.

As so often in the theatre, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and we should not ignore the fact that in most theatres it was the artistic director who inevitably acted as de facto mentor. He or she dispensed advice and wise counsel as required, especially with regard to such matters as casting and choice of designer, where their combination of contacts and awareness of budgetary and technical limitations acted as a practical and useful brake on any fantastical ambitions on the part of the play director. The artistic directors were also at pains to impress upon the play directors the requirements of 'house-style' and local environment. This was one of the clear strengths of the RTI: talented, emerging play directors becoming aware of how their creative process fits into the wider considerations of running a large building-based theatre through hands-on experience in the company of senior professionals.

One young director went so far as to say that the requirement of an external mentor was an insult to the artistic director who had expended such a massive amount of time and effort monitoring and abetting that director's progress and development.

Nevertheless, we should remember that the appointment of a mentor was a visible condition of the RTI, and that a small amount of the budget was supposed to have been set aside to cover this. The Foundation should bear in mind for the future that, strictly speaking, most of the theatres did not fulfil an obligation of the sponsorship.

### **5.3. Tracking the directors**

We were asked to note the progress of the first young directors after they concluded their internships.

Rufus Norris' production of *Afore Night Come* won him the Evening Standard Theatre Award for Most Promising Newcomer, with Ian MacNeil's design being nominated in the best design category. Mr Norris has since joined the Young Vic as an associate director where his productions have included *Peribanez* (Tanya Ronder, 2003, after Lope de Vega, 1605-8) and *Sleeping Beauty* (Charles Perrault, 1697), and where he now mentors young directors on the theatre's continuing director training programme. He directed *Small Change* (Peter Gill, 1983) for the author's festival at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, and is about to direct an adaptation of the Dogme film *Festen* at the Almeida Theatre, London.

After directing *Andorra* at the Young Vic, Gregory Thompson returned to working with his company AandBC on a revival of a physical theatre piece, *The Tale that Wags the Dog*, at the Lyric Hammersmith Studio and the Bull Theatre, Barnet, and *The Tempest* (William Shakespeare, 1611) that toured to Romania, Russia, Czech Republic, Hong Kong and Trinidad. He has since directed *As You Like It* (William Shakespeare, c.1598-1600) for the Royal Shakespeare Company, 2003.

Since directing *The Taming of the Shrew* at Salisbury Playhouse, Douglas Rintoul has directed at the National Theatre Studio, directed two projects for the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and returned to Salisbury to direct *Copenhagen* (Michael Frayn, 1998). He is currently staff-directing the forthcoming National Theatre-Theatre de Complicité production of *Measure for Measure* (William Shakespeare, 1604) and will return to Salisbury in the autumn to direct *Much Ado about Nothing* (William Shakespeare, 1600).

Anna Mackmin has been appointed associate director alongside Michael Grandage at Sheffield Theatres, with continuing responsibility for new writing development and where she has since directed *The Crucible* (Arthur Miller, 1953). She also directed *Auntie & Me* (Morris Panwych, 2002) at the Wyndham's Theatre, London after an Edinburgh Festival fringe run, *Food Chain* (Mick Mahoney, 2003) at the Royal Court Theatre, and will soon direct *The Dark* (Charlotte Jones, 2004), at the Donmar Warehouse, London.

## 6. CODA

During the 1990s, regional theatres were unnerved by the low levels of government subsidy. Theatres felt that they were often judged not by the work that they did, but by the state of the balance sheet. Their prevailing artistic consciousness and vigour was ebbing away. In this situation, there had been a grave shortage of inspirational artistic leaders wanting to be domiciled in the regions; a flight into freelance careers occurred. However, with promises of increased investment in drama in England from 2002, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Arts Council England understood that a healthier theatre industry cannot be made merely by giving the companies more money: the theatres' renaissance would depend on the talents of play directors. They would collectively become the next generation of artistic directors. The 'Regional Theatre Initiative' was born out of the imperative that this new talent should be discovered and fostered. The Foundation saw the opportunity and responded strategically.

We would like to re-cap briefly, what it achieved. The strength of the RTI was that it directly addressed the heart and bones of theatre-making. The Trustees saw those things without which a theatre cannot flourish: the Foundation enabled theatres to stage large-scale classic plays whilst entrusting these productions to up-and-coming talent on whom the theatres previously felt unable to take the risk. Through its successful partnership with Arts Council England, the Foundation, following an initial venture at the Young Vic Theatre, London, has helped theatres at Salisbury, Sheffield, Birmingham, Nottingham and Leeds, to redeem and energise their ambitions and standards. These theatre artists directed large-scale productions; they have made the transition from fringe to institutional theatre. How much more the theatres can do to re-establish themselves will now depend on their ability to incline this new associate director cadre towards the profession of artistic director. Managements invariably bemoan a situation in which they can apply for and often receive funding for almost anything except productions. This scheme was therefore much appreciated by the participating theatres.

Our report has demonstrated that there were really two equal facets to the scheme: firstly, that of directors creating classic productions and, secondly, the aspiration for incubating new artistic directors. Possibly, the second purpose was too ambitious, but time will tell. In the short-term, because of the ascendance of visiting shows and co-productions, there may be insufficient openings for full-time associate directors at the theatres, but in the longer-term, with extra experience of theatrical management skills, several of the directors might be encouraged to want to run a resident theatre. Nevertheless, even with the insufficiency of leadership training, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's 'Regional Theatre Initiative' is worthy of celebration. It was a success not only because the theatres understood its potential and made it work, but also because the Foundation trusted them to do so.

## 7. APPENDICES

### 7.1. Persons Consulted

<b>Richard Baron</b>	Associate Director, Nottingham Playhouse
<b>Dan Bates</b>	Executive Director, West Yorkshire Playhouse
<b>Ian Brown</b>	Artistic Director & Chief Executive, West Yorkshire Playhouse
<b>Peter Cheeseman</b>	Theatre director
<b>Jonathan Church</b>	Artistic Director, Birmingham Rep
<b>Giles Croft</b>	Artistic Director, Nottingham Playhouse
<b>Amanda Donohue</b>	Actor, <i>Teeth 'n' Smiles</i> , Sheffield Crucible Theatre
<b>Femi Elufowoju, Jnr</b>	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation intern: Leeds
<b>Toby Frow</b>	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation intern: Birmingham
<b>William Gaskill</b>	Theatre director
<b>Shreela Ghosh</b>	Programme Director, Arts & Heritage, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
<b>Peter Gill</b>	Theatre director and playwright
<b>Michael Grandage</b>	Associate Director, Sheffield Theatres Trust
<b>Hayden Griffin</b>	Designer, <i>Iphigenia</i> , Sheffield Crucible Theatre
<b>John Harrison</b>	Director Emeritus, West Yorkshire Playhouse
<b>Giles Havergal</b>	Theatre director
<b>Isobel Hawson</b>	Senior Drama Officer, Arts Council England
<b>Sue Higginson</b>	Former Director, National Theatre Studio
<b>Ewan Hooper</b>	Actor, <i>Andorra</i> , Young Vic Theatre
<b>Margaret Hyde</b>	Director, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
<b>Jerry Knight-Smith</b>	Casting Director, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester
<b>David Lan</b>	Artistic Director, Young Vic Theatre, London
<b>Anna Mackmin</b>	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation intern: Sheffield
<b>Ian MacNeil</b>	Set designer, <i>Afore Night Come</i> , Young Vic Theatre
<b>Andrew McKinnon</b>	Theatre director
<b>Tanya Moodie</b>	Actor, <i>Medea</i> , West Yorkshire Playhouse
<b>Rebecca Morland</b>	Executive Director, Salisbury Playhouse
<b>Grahame Morris</b>	Chief Executive, Sheffield Theatres Trust
<b>Ruari Murchison</b>	Designer, <i>Medea</i> , West Yorkshire Playhouse
<b>Rufus Norris</b>	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation intern: Young Vic Theatre
<b>Clive Perry</b>	Theatre director
<b>Joanna Read</b>	Artistic Director, Salisbury Playhouse
<b>Douglas Rintoul</b>	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation intern: Salisbury
<b>Stuart Rogers</b>	Executive Director, Birmingham Rep
<b>Paul Savage</b>	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation intern: Nottingham
<b>Stephanie Sirr</b>	Chief Executive, Nottingham Playhouse
<b>Jack Tarlton</b>	Actor, <i>Afore Night Come</i> , Young Vic Theatre
<b>Gregory Thompson</b>	Esmée Fairbairn Foundation intern: Young Vic Theatre
<b>Leo Wringer</b>	Actor, <i>Othello</i> , Nottingham Playhouse

## 7.2. Principal references examined

*A New Pattern of Patronage, The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain*, London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1958.

Adsetts, Sir Norman, et al., *Sheffield Theatres' Annual Review April 2002–March 2003*, Sheffield, Sheffield Theatres Trust, 2004.

Baker Tilly, *Birmingham Repertory Theatre Limited Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2002*, Birmingham, Baker Tilly, 19 December 2002.

Arts Council of England, East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association and Nottingham Playhouse, *Eclipse Report: developing strategies to combat racism in theatre*, London, Arts Council of England, 2001.

Boyden Southwood, *Training of Theatre Practitioners Study*, London, Boyden Southwood Associates, September 1997.

Boyden, Peter, *Roles and Functions of the English Regional Producing Theatres*, Bristol, Peter Boyden Associates, for the Arts Council of England, 2000.

Brown, Ian, 'Artistic activity must thrive: New work is a recognised box-office risk and calls for extra financial support', London, *The Times*, 6 October 2003, p. 19.

Channel 4, *Theatre Directors Scheme: How the Scheme Works*, [www.c4tds.co.uk](http://www.c4tds.co.uk)

Cheeseman, Peter, 'Artistic rape', London, *The Guardian*, 26 February 2002, p.19. [on 'several appointments to the fashionable post of "chief executive", firmly demoting the artistic director in regional theatre'].

Cooper, Mel, (ed.), *Genesis Directors Project at the Young Vic*, London, Genesis Foundation, 15 April 2003. [www.genesisfoundation.org.uk/indexf2.html](http://www.genesisfoundation.org.uk/indexf2.html)

Cork, Kenneth, *Theatre is for all: Report of the Enquiry into Professional Theatre in England*, London, Arts Council of Great Britain, September 1986.

Dean, Anthony, (ed.), *Creative Producing. A User's Guide*, London, Central School of Speech and Drama, 2001.

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, *Annual Review 2002*, London, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 2003.

*Going on the Stage: A Report to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation on professional training for drama*, London, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1975.

Grant Thornton, *Leeds Theatre Trust Limited: Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2003*, Leeds, Grant Thornton, 20 August 2003.

Hawson, Isobel, and Shreela Ghosh, *Guidelines: Esmée Fairbairn/Arts Council of England Regional Theatre Initiative*, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Arts Council of England, London, August 2001.

Hawson, Isobel, *Professional development for talented directors on the mid to larger stages in the English subsidised sector*, London, Arts Council of England, January 2001. [memorandum to Esmée Fairbairn Foundation].

\_\_\_\_\_, *The training of theatre practitioners*, Arts Council England, December 2003. [internal memorandum].

Hawsons, *Sheffield Theatres Trust Consolidated Annual Report Year Ended 31 March 2001*, Sheffield, Hawsons, 19 September 2001.

Hewison, Robert and John Holden, *Clore Leadership: The Clore Leadership Programme: an investment in the rising generation of cultural leaders is necessary, and timely*, London, Clore Duffield Foundation, 2002.

James Menzies-Kitchen Memorial Trust, *Young Director's Award*, Shipston-on-Stour, 2004. [www.jmktrust.org/introduction.html](http://www.jmktrust.org/introduction.html)

Jerwood Charitable Foundation, *Jerwood Young Directors at the Young Vic*, [www.jerwood.org.uk/charity/youngdirectors.html](http://www.jerwood.org.uk/charity/youngdirectors.html)

Marmion, Patrick, 'The Young Vic has ambitious new plans', *London Times*, 8 December 2003, p.14. [on Young Vic Young Directors Project].

McKinnon, Andrew, *A report on the training of theatre directors*, London, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and National Council for Drama Training, October 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Courses for Directors: a very brief guide to courses and training opportunities for theatre directors*, London, National Council for Drama Training, 1996.

Metier, *The Leadership Challenge: A review of management and leadership in subsidised arts organisations in England*, Bradford, Metier, 2000. [consultation draft].

Morgan, Charles, Angela Lyttle and Peter Finch, *A Report on the Subsidised Theatre in the UK*, London, The Theatre Commission, November 1996.

*Nottingham Playhouse 1963-1968*, Nottingham, Nottingham Theatre Trust, 1969

PricewaterhouseCoopers, *Nottingham Theatre Trust Limited: Directors' Report and Accounts*, Castle Donnington, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 31 March 2003.

Rosenthal, Daniel, 'It's the Gang Show: do playhouse bosses need a support team', *London, The Times*, 16 October 2002, p.19.

Runciman, Rosie, (ed.), Dominic Shellard et al, *Theatre 2001 – future directions. Proceedings of the First Joint Conference. Organised by The Society of London Theatre, Theatrical Management Association, Independent Theatre Council*, London, Theatre 2001 and John Good Holbrook, June 2001.

Salisbury Arts Theatre Limited, *Balance Sheet & Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ending 31 March 2003*, Salisbury, Salisbury Playhouse, 2003. [unaudited, internal accounts].

School of English and Humanities, *MFA Theatre Directing: Guide for Applicants 2004-5*, London, Birkbeck University of London, 2003.

Tait, Simon, 'Regional theatres give life to aspirations of young directors', *London, The Times*, 15 September 2003, p. 28.

*The Arts Council of England National Policy for Theatre in England*, London, Arts Council of England, July 2000.

Theatre Communications Group, *A Review of the New Artistic Leadership Institute 2002*, New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2003.

*Young Vic Theatre Company: Evaluation Report for Direct Action to Esmée Fairbairn Foundation*, London, Young Vic Theatre, February 2002.

## THE LAUGHING AUDIENCE

The Laughing Audience is a theatrical management and research consultancy that has undertaken briefs for over thirty theatres and theatre companies since 1997.

Steven Gale was assistant director at Leeds Playhouse, director of the Granary Theatre, Cork and assistant artistic director at the Royal Lyceum Theatre Company, Edinburgh. He was assistant director on the Edinburgh International Festival productions of *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*, *Life is a Dream* and *Barbaric Comedies*. He holds a BA from the University of Exeter and an MA from the University of Leeds.

Paul Iles is associate director of the Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond, a trustee of The Theatres Trust and a director of the Grand Theatre, Blackpool. He was foundation manager of the Edinburgh Festival Theatre, general manager of Nimrod Theatre, Sydney and the State Theatre Company at the Adelaide Festival Centre. He holds research degrees of MPhil and MLitt from the University of Glasgow.