

Climbing new heights in theatre training

Liverpool has an illustrious theatrical history, and is well-known for its inventiveness. These two traditions came together at the end of September at the Empire Theatre: **John Crumpton**, BECTU's Northern Learning Organiser, reports.



Trainees prepare to scale the heights

Eight candidates completed the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT) Silver Award in Stage Sound on a five-day course organized by BECTU. In the spring the Everyman Theatre generously hosted the first three days of the Award. Candidates studied audio and electrical theory, as well as having practical sessions using different types of communications equipment and making their own electronic projects. The training was delivered by experienced ABTT members, working theatre professionals themselves.

This step forward in theatre training on Merseyside is part of a pilot scheme in the North West, Midlands and South West regions to offer professional stage training. The courses were subsidised by BECTU with financial support from the Union Learning Fund and employers. These three modules formed the first three parts of the five-part

Silver Award. The candidates were full-time staff or casuals at the Everyman/Playhouse and Empire Theatres. Administrator and Union Learning Rep at the Everyman, Victoria Adlard, says: "The two remaining modules both involved working at height safely... the Everyman was not high enough and the Playhouse was unavailable. There are good links between us and BECTU reps at the Empire and they came to the rescue."

Steve Rose and Alan Blanche were able to persuade their employers, Ambassador Theatre Group, of the benefits of such training for their workforce. Deputy Theatre Manager Christiaan de Villiers offered the Empire Theatre as the solution.

On the first day, tutor Ted Murphy described several near-misses and actual accidents caused by unsafe practices in theatres he'd worked in. If people understood H&S

regulations and code of practices for working at height, then the theatre industry would be a safer and healthier environment.

On the second day Chris Higgs, a very experienced rigger who's worked in every major theatre in the UK, was tutor. Like Ted, he has been affected by seeing close workmates lost to injury and death from falls. So when he's serious they listen. And they needed to, as in the afternoon the group put on their helmets, harnesses and other safety gear. Everyone had the chance to learn safely, hanging from fixed points on stage and in the circle. Even the faint-hearted had a go and grew in confidence as the day wore on.

We have set up a Collective Learning Fund at the Everyman, supported by unionlearn and North-West TUC, and are considering courses including sign language for theatre ushers.

John Crumpton

New Welsh slate

CULT Cymru – the BECTU-led joint union learning project in Wales – has announced its new slate of short courses in South and North Wales from January to March. It includes new workshops: Negotiation and Interview Techniques, Pitching and Presenting, Introduction to Web Design and Improving your On-stage Presence. Prices start at £10 for union members. See the updated CULT Cymru website www.cultcymru.org or contact beth@bectu.org.uk or call 029 2055 4601 (Tuesdays or Wednesdays).

Training in Truro

BECTU will be piloting a brand-new Health & Safety course at the Hall for Cornwall in Truro in mid February. The day will be followed by a further half-day as part of a new project to develop a union-owned safety course for all members, developed and delivered by BECTU member and safety trainer/consultant (and cameraman) Guy Littlemore from Bristol.

To register your interest contact South West Learning Organiser Martin Roberts on 07760755912 or mroberts@bectu.org.uk

Courses for reps

A full programme of courses for all union reps and activists, starting on 19 January at head office, is now open for enrolment. They are based on the skills of representation, organisation, negotiation and communication. Book via www.bectu.org.uk/training-development/courses/45

Bristol bash

For details of a training event with Western freelance branch in Bristol on 4 February, including green lighting and health and safety, contact Martin Roberts: mroberts@bectu.org.uk

Training funds for freelances

Skillset has launched two bursary schemes to help professionals from the film and television industries access training in the key priority areas of Craft & Technical and Health & Safety. The Television Freelance Fund (TVFF) has committed £50,000 for Craft & Technical bursaries for people working in the TV industry.

The £50,000 Health & Safety bursary scheme has been created by the TVFF and the Film Skills Fund (FSF) and bursaries are available to people working in either the TV or film industries.

Individual bursaries of up to £800 for freelances or £500 for company employees will be available through each scheme to cover the cost of a broad range of courses that have been approved by Skillset.

For more information see www.skillset.org/ctbursaries and www.skillset.org/hsbursaries respectively.