

Counterparts Music Theatre Arts

**“LOVE LETTERS”**

or

**“HOW FAR WILL YOU GO TO GET WHAT YOU WANT?”**

PRIMARY SCHOOLS PROJECTS 2010 – 2011



**Report to the Ernest Cook Trust**

## Introduction

In 2009 Counterparts Music Theatre Arts was planning the creation and production of a new opera with music composed by Helen Porter, based on the novella 'The Aspern Papers' by Henry James. This novella is a psycho-thriller, relating the efforts of an American editor to get his hands on letters written by a Victorian poet, the late Jeffery Aspern. The editor suspects that a former mistress of Aspern, the now almost 100 years old Juliana, a recluse in a crumbling Venetian palace, still has love letters which the great poet once addressed to her. The editor is prepared to go any length to get these letters in his possession.

Alongside this opera project, Counterparts MTA was keen to work in schools and create opportunities for children to meet the composer, musicians and theatre makers, and experience first hand the exciting process of creating new music theatre work. This schools programme was given the title 'Love Letters, or How far will you go to get what you want?' In April 2009, the Ernest Cook Trust granted £6,500 funding towards this project.

Despite the exciting potential of both work streams, neither was without difficulty. Although the Royal Opera House showed, through its development programme, great interest in the opera piece and awarded composer Helen Porter two development weeks to work with professional singers on draft scenes of the opera, Arts Council England did not grant the funding to develop the opera project in full. The composer has continued working on the piece, but - without underlying funding - it has not yet been possible to develop and complete the work as was hoped. The schools programme was in first instance offered to secondary schools, but despite approaching many secondary schools in the Dorset/Wiltshire region, none were able to commit, explaining that they had difficulty fitting it into their overloaded curriculum.

In the spring of 2010 a request was made to the Ernest Cook Trust to focus the education project in stead on primary schools , and this was agreed. It turned out to be an effective change, and from May 2010 until March 2011 the project took place in primary schools in Dorset and Wiltshire.



## Workshop Dates

'Love Letters' or 'How far will you go to get what you want?' workshops took place on the following dates:

**- 25 to 27 May 2010**

Sarum St Paul's CE Primary School, Salisbury  
workshops facilitated by Tony Horitz (drama) and Helen Porter (music)

**- 29 September, 6, 13, 20 October, 3, 17. 24 November, 1, 8, 15 December 2010**

Elmrise Primary School, Bournemouth  
workshops facilitated by Tony Horitz and Helen Porter

**- 17 to 21 January 2011**

St Andrews School, Laverstock, Salisbury  
workshops facilitated by Rebecca Seymour (movement) and Victoria Gater (music)

**- 2, 9, 16 February, 2, 9, 16 March 2011**

Bulford St Leonards CE Primary School, Salisbury  
workshops facilitated by Tony Horitz and Helen Porter

**- 9, 16 February, 2, 16, 23, 30 March 2011**

Elmrise Primary School, Oakmead location  
workshops facilitated by Helen Porter and Tony Horitz

One further school was interested to take part in the programme, but withdrew shortly before the planned workshop dates, due to over commitments on their part. However, in the schools that did take part the workshops were very well received, both by the children and the teachers. One of the more challenging schools, Elmrise in Bournemouth, asked for a second series of workshops. A more detailed review of the work undertaken, including some of the song lyrics the workshops generated, follows on the next page.



*'Children at the outdoor performance, Sarum St Paul's School*

## **SARUM ST PAULS, SALISBURY**

Drama & Music

Project dates: May 25 – 28, 2010

Contact person: Jenny Larssen (Head teacher)

Whole school – creative project devised during Arts Week

Out door performance for staff, children and parents

Tony Horitz and Helen Porter spent four days in the school devising this arts project with children from various class groups. The project culminated in an outdoor showing, as part of a larger arts event for Artsweek. The children were very enthusiastic about singing and performing – the school already had a good track record for arts activities, encouraged strongly by Jenny Larssen, the head teacher who has a background in dance.

### **SONGS**

#### **I'D JUMP THROUGH LAVA**

I'd jump through lava (*Jump through lava*)

I'd risk my life (*Risk my life*)

I'd climb Kilimanjaro (climb Kilimanjaro)

Throw myself in Niagra falls!

I'd kick a ball (*Yeah!*)

Beyond my dreams (*Oh!*)

I'd fly to the moon (*when?*)

Just before noon

I'd even eat...steamed cabbage and green beans!

I'd climb to the top of the tallest tree

Throw myself in a nest of bees

Try not to cry when you scratch your knees

Well you're about as brave as fleas!

#### **ON WE TRUDGE**

On we trudge through slimey swamps

Burning desert, spooky caves

Will we ever get there? Get there?

Will we ever get there? Get there?

On we trudge through stormy seas

Lakes of fire and mud and ice

Will we ever get there? Get there?

Will we ever get there? Get there?

On we trudge

On we trudge

(*repeat & fade*)

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## **ELMRISE PRIMARY SCHOOL, BOURNEMOUTH**

Drama & Music (Media and Dance)

Project dates: 10 days between September and 15 December (Helen Porter and Tony Horitz)

Further Project dates requested by school: 6 days between 9 February and 30 March 2011

Contact person: Emma Burton

- School status: deprived/failing
- Project also included deputy head of Oakmead School, Emma Burton, who is also a dance teacher, and her colleague Toni, who incorporated elements of film into the final showing
- Children worked on devising dance, songs and drama around the theme of 'How Far Would You Go To Get What You Want?'. They developed a story about 3 teams travelling to a remote Island, overcoming various challenges along the way.
- Very challenging behaviour from the children. Difficulties focussing, a lot of very obstructive behaviour. They found it very difficult to work together as one group, so much of the work took place by dividing the group into 3 and working on the 3 disciplines separately.
- Gave performance to their peer group, members of staff and head teacher. The end result, despite the difficulties, was a very positive outcome, and the staff/head were extremely pleased and complimentary, as were all of the children who participated.
- We were invited back to work with the school again, with a different group of children, as the staff involved felt that the project had had such a positive impact on the children.

## **SONGS**

### **QUEST GROUP 1: PLANE**

We're going on a journey  
We're heading out West  
We're travelling a distance  
And we know we're gonna be the best  
Oh yeah!

We're sitting on the plane  
There's nothing to do  
I need a lap top  
I need the loo  
We're getting nervous  
We're getting sick  
We're hot and bothered  
We need to get there quick!

There's clouds and dolphins out the window  
There's birds flying in the sky  
The planes rocking in the stormy night  
And we feel like we're going to die!

## **QUEST GROUP 2: BALLOON**

We're going on a journey  
We're heading out West  
We're travelling a distance  
And we know we're gonna be the best  
Oh yeah!

We need a mobile  
We need a tent  
We need a night light, a lamp and a torch  
We need a PSP, a rope and a medical bag  
We need a catapult to help us launch.

We need a blanket  
We need a bed  
We need a pillow  
Under our head  
We need food and drink  
To keep us alive  
We need a diving suit  
For when we arrive

## **QUEST GROUP 3: BOAT**

We're going on a journey  
We're heading out West  
We're travelling a distance  
And we know we're gonna be the best  
Oh yeah!

We're in a smelly boat  
We're on the sea  
We've lost the compass  
We're sailing free  
We're far behind the others  
We need to speed up  
If we don't get there soon  
We're gonna throw up

The sails are broken  
And now we're lost  
The salesman lied to us  
It's not first class!  
We're sick of salmon  
For our tea  
And to drink  
We've only got the salty sea!

## **SPIDERS CRAWLING**

There are spiders crawling  
Snakes are slithering  
Dinosaurs snoring down in a gory den  
There's splattering mud  
And what's that blood?  
And Look! There's a heap of skeleton men!

We don't like it here but we can't get away!  
The bushes have trapped us!

### **CREATURES STALKING**

Creatures stalking slowly on the sandy ground  
We don't know if they're going to feed on us  
We don't like their stenchy breath  
We are feeling close to death!

Where can we hide?  
Where can we go?  
We are brave so we mustn't be slow!  
Run to the left  
Run to the right  
Quick let's go before we lose the light!

I don't like it here on the island  
What about you?  
it's OK here, I'm not scared,  
I'm going to inspect the volcano  
Do you want to come too?

Off we go!  
Step and step  
Up the hill...



*Theatre maker Tony Horitz with children from Sarum St Paul's School*

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## **ST ANDREWS PRIMARY SCHOOL, SALISBURY**

Drama & Percussion

Project dates: 17 to 21 January 2011 (Rebecca Seymour and Victoria Gater)

- The workshops took place with Years 5 and 6. Rebecca and Victoria and the children looked at role models good and bad, and discussed what people do to get what they want – even 'going onto the dark side'. Key words that related to this were selected: Push, Compete, Battle, Cheat, Sacrifice, Fame, Success, Effort, Determination, Desire. The children created duets to illustrate these words.
- Victoria Gater worked with half the group learning basic drumming technique and a specific west African rhythm. Rebecca taught a strong travelling sequence that went with the drumming, illustrating Push and Determination. Both groups learnt the drumming and the movement.
- They chose which celebrity or career they aspired to and developed a character around this.
- The project ended with a whole group sequence developed from their decisions of one famous person who'd gone to the dark side to get what they want: The Wicked Witch of the West from The Wizard of Oz and one who'd sacrificed hugely to get what they wanted: Nelson Mandela. Victoria created a percussion soundscape to accompany this.
- The final results were performed to the whole school on the last day.

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## **BULFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Drama & Music

Project dates: 6 dates between 2 February and 16 March 2011 (Tony Horitz and Helen Porter)

Contact person: Chris (class teacher)

- This school has many army personnel children, which means that children are often moving around, arriving and leaving.
- This project used the character of Florence Nightingale, as the school were eager to combine the 'How far will you go?' theme with something relevant to their curriculum. The children researched Florence Nightingale, and her place in the history books, despite all of her difficulties (including parental disapproval) in getting where she wanted.
- We developed a drama based around the life of Florence Nightingale. Songs were developed in the classroom, with the children making up lyrics (see below) and melodies. These were very successful.
- The project was performed to the rest of the school and staff, and the comments were very complimentary to facilitators and the children.

## **SONGS**

### **DOWN IN HORROR HOSPITAL**

Down in Horror Hospital  
The rats are crawling 'round  
There's germs and filth in every ward  
And soldiers lying sick upon the ground.

And down in Horror Hospital  
It's damp and wet and cold  
There's mud and muck upon the ground  
And soldiers dying, soldiers crying  
Soldiers who were brave and bold.





*Composer Helen Porter at work with children at Sarum St Paul's School*



*Sarum St Paul's School, children assembled for the final performance.*

## Outcomes

The photographs in this report, taken in one of the participating schools (Sarum St Paul's School in Salisbury), demonstrate alongside the feedback and song lyrics how much children enjoy creative engagement. It indicates that direct contact with and guidance from professional musicians and theatre makers is valuable and beneficial for children, and that it will almost certainly unlock creative potential in some of them. For our organisation the objective of this project was 'to create real opportunities for young people in school to explore the creative and dramatic processes of making professional music, art or theatre', and we feel we have achieved this objective well.

At the same time we must acknowledge that the project concept may have been too ambitious, with regard to the numbers we could achieve. This is partly due to the workloads that schools have to deal with, resulting in the initial difficulty in getting schools to sign up for the project. In the delay caused by changing focus from secondary to primary schools the project had perhaps lost some of its momentum. We had hoped to deliver 64 artist days in schools, and have delivered 60 half days. We had aimed to work with 500 children, whilst our estimation is that 350 children have benefitted directly from the programme.

The financial outcomes of the project are shown below:

<b>Income</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Actual</b>	
Salisbury DC	500	500	
Hall & Woodhouse	313	313	
Dorset CC	1500	1,000	DCC allocated funding was reduced due to council budget cuts
Schools contributions	6,400	1,250	
Counterparts MTA reserves	2,887	0	
Ernest Cook Trust	6,500	6,500	
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,100</b>	<b>9,563</b>	
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Artist fees	12,800	5,700	£1600 was paid directly by one of the schools to the workshop facilitator
Materials	2,000	355.30	
Travel	800	591	
Promotion	200	0	
Administration cost	300	250	
Coordination	1800	1800	
Documentation/photography	200	100	
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,100</b>	<b>8,796.30</b>	
<b>Balance (income minus expenditure)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>766.70</b>	

## **Conclusion**

In balance we must conclude that, despite initial difficulties in getting the education programme started, and the disappointment that we were not successful in raising the funds to run the programme in conjunction with the actual production of the opera project, 'Love Letters or How far will you go?' has been a valuable project for children and schools. The songs and lyrics produced show that the theme was inspiring, and offered much potential for the schools to integrate this work into their curriculum. Working with the professional theatre makers and musicians will have given many children a positive experience of theatre and music, and confidence for taking their own creative talents seriously.

The project has also provided valuable learning for Counterparts MTA as a relatively young organisation, which we will take forward in future projects we hope to develop.

We would like to thank the Ernest Cook Trust for the funding support provided to this project.