

## **Ocho – How a theatre project changed lives.**



### **The Background:**

In September 2016, Lucy Riley, head of drama at Archbishop Sentamu School in Hull set up The Spotlight Scholarship programme to help gifted and talented pupils from within the school to further reach their potential. The school lies in the 16<sup>th</sup> most deprived area in the U.K. and pursuing a career in the arts for any of these pupils can seem unachievable especially as many pupils are lacking in self-belief. Pupils are selected for the scholarship due to their outstanding talent and are afforded an additional 75 minute lesson on their timetable to develop their performance skills enabling the school to tackle more advanced techniques and bring in industry professionals to conduct workshops. At a time when the arts are continually facing cut backs in schools this programme is extraordinary and unique. In order to launch the scholarship, Lucy approached BAFTA winning playwrights Jane Thornton and John Godber who had done previous drama work in the school. It was decided that Jane would write and

direct a play with music and songs which would play to the strengths of the Spotlight ensemble.

## **The Play:**

“**Ocho**” tells the story of eight men from Hull who went to fight in the Spanish Civil War and was told to Jane by Gary Hammond, percussionist with The Beautiful South. Gary was raising funds to build a memorial to these men and seeking a platform to make people aware of the sacrifices they made. Thus the two ideas came together. Jane worked with local historians and relatives of the eight men to weave together this fascinating tale, not only of the men but of the wives they left behind. Beginning in Hull in 1936 and set against the background of the Depression, the play evokes memories of picnics in East Park, the tannery, the docks and the joy of washing day! Facing the challenge of unemployment and the rise of Fascism, James Bentley and Robert Wardle decide to take a train from Paragon Station in Hull and travel to London, through France and over the Pyrenees on foot to fight with the International Brigades in Spain. They left behind, their wives; Kitty and Maggie and three small children who despite the struggles of the time remained optimistic and hopeful for their husband’s return.

## **The ambition:**

It was important from the start that the young people involved in this project be given the chance to work alongside industry professionals in order to produce something of professional standard which would give them pride and belief in themselves and raise their game. Unfortunately the project failed to achieve funding from the City of Culture 2017, but rather than be defeated a fund raising campaign was launched with the hope of not only being able to perform the piece in Hull but to take it on a small tour around the region in order for the cast to experience performing in different professional spaces. The ultimate ambition was to be able to take it to Barcelona. Through his connections as a Fellow at Liverpool John Moore’s University, John Godber was able to organise taking the play to the prestigious Institute of the Arts in Barcelona. In order to achieve all this, we needed to raise twenty six thousand pounds to pay for the student’s travel and accommodation.

Jane Thornton wrote and directed the play for free, Dave Rotheray of The Beautiful South (Don't Marry Her, Perfect 10, I Need a Little Time) along with Liam Foster and Gary Hammond gifted the music. Lucy Weller, designer (National Theatre, Royal Court) did us an amazing design and many other creatives worked for free or for vastly reduced fees. Inspired by the talent of the amazing young cast the project was also lucky enough to receive funding and help from some amazing Hull firms and individuals including Hudgell's Solicitors, Sewells, Lord Prescott, The John Godber Company, The City Council, Unite the Union, The European Union of Women, Mr and Mrs Heuck and many more. With all this generous support we managed to reach our target.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2017, after sell out performances in Hull and on tour (with standing ovations at every venue) the cast left Leeds Bradford Airport for Barcelona and performed to a full audience at the institute of the Arts.

*"A revelation: story, music and level of engagement of a talented teenage cast. Stunning student performances of great assurance"*

*Clare Brennan theatre reviewer for The Observer*

## **The legacy:**

The Ocho project has been remarkable by any standards. Not only have the students continued to grow and find confidence but their skill levels and interest in the theatre has also expanded in all directions. This is exemplified by the exceptional number of places that that members of the cast have secured at leading drama schools and universities. Immediately after the performance in Barcelona the principal Giles Auckland Lewis was so impressed that he immediately offered two of the cast members; Elle Ideson and Corey Rylands full scholarships to study on the BA Acting Course. Such scholarships have never been offered before and are worth in the region of £100,000. This is what Giles said:

*"Education is a beautiful and precious thing and should be available to all. Too often young people because of their social and financial situations are denied access to the best education. This is very sad. Last year we were delighted to host John and Jane Godber with their production of Ocho. The performance*

*was remarkable. The youngsters demonstrated such maturity and understanding and clearly had engaged with both the craft of acting and intellectual content of the piece. Without consulting each other my business partner and I came to the same conclusion- we wanted some of those youngsters to come to the IAB and we made the decision there and then to offer scholarships to two of the performers (we would have liked to have offered more) We know that this will be a life changing experience for them. The IAB is one of the world's most exciting and diverse institutions with 85% of its students coming from outside Spain. It will hopefully inspire them to go on and chase their dreams- we are thrilled to have them with us."*

However, little did we know at the time but this was just the beginning! With new-found confidence and self-belief many more members of the talented 17-strong cast decided to apply for drama school and university places. For the majority of them they are the first members of their family to go to university. In December we remounted the play in Hull and invited Adrian Hall the Principal of the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts London and the North, another leading drama school, to see the performance. He was equally as impressed as Giles and offered places to the entire cast to attend the acting foundation course without the need to audition, along with a number of scholarships and funded places on the BA acting course. Scholarship students will be taking up the following places in September 2018, 2019 and 2020:

	<b>Tom Gallagher</b>	BA Acting Academy Live and recorded Arts
	<b>Kurtis Ford</b>	Awarded fully funded place on ALRA Acting foundation course

	<b>Elle Ideson</b>	Awarded Scholarship Institute of the Arts Barcelona, BA Acting
	<b>Beth Murrell</b>	Liverpool Institute of performing Arts BA Community Drama
	<b>Aleesha Neill</b>	Liverpool Institute of performing Arts BA Community Drama
	<b>Natalie Wharam</b>	Awarded Scholarship for BA Acting, Academy Live and Recorded Arts/ reserve place LIPA BA Acting.
	<b>Alex Ledger</b>	York St John BA Community Drama. Reserve place LIPA
	<b>Jade Farnill</b>	Arden School of Theatre, BA Musical theatre and place on foundation at Italia Conti.
	<b>Corey Rylands</b>	Awarded scholarship Institute of the Arts Barcelona, BA Acting. (2019)

	<b>Prince Gandifere</b>	Awarded scholarship to study on BA Acting Course ALRA (2019)
	<b>Katherine Gilroy</b>	Awarded scholarship to study on BA acting course ALRA (2019)
	<b>Kazmia Kara</b>	Awarded scholarship to study on BA acting course (2020)

## **Why we need your help:**

A first audition for drama school can cost on average £50 and then there's more to pay if you get a recall. We've managed to get over this hurdle by inviting drama school staff to Hull, getting pupils seen in productions and providing funds from the Scholarship to assist with this. We are also extremely grateful to Adrian Hall from ALRA in particular, for waiving all audition fees now and in the foreseeable future. However, despite loans being available to pay tuition fees, all these young people still need to find money for accommodation and living. They can take out another loan but this will make their debts enormous; the thought of this can make their ambitions seem unattainable and they may end up not going. All these young people are used to working Saturday jobs etc, but finding the time to continue with similar work when you're on a drama course is almost impossible as you are often in school for ten hours a day due to rehearsals. Those students from higher income families whose parents can afford to pay for accommodation and living are certainly more advantaged; don't need to juggle courses with jobs and have much less debt at the end of the course. It is simply not a level playing

field. Consequently, we are fund-raising to give each pupil a little extra help with this depending on their needs.

Our ambition is to raise ten thousand pounds per year which will go in to a trust fund to support these pupils both now and in the future.

Please help by attending our Gala lunch on 10th June 2018 or you can make a donation by contacting Liam Foster at Archbishop Sentamu Academy on 01482 781912 [foster.l@sentamuacademy.org](mailto:foster.l@sentamuacademy.org) or Sharelle Gibbons at Hudgell Solicitors 01482787771 [sgi@hudgettsolicitors.co.uk](mailto:sgi@hudgettsolicitors.co.uk).

Thank you