

Programme notes

THE YOUNG PEOPLE

About eighteen months ago Wild Nights-Young Company was born. At our initial meeting there was talk of a collaboration with Mark Beeson, our director, which would end in 2006. None of us could picture the end result. Yet after two trips onto the high moor with Devon Discovery, a trip to Yarnor Wood, months of Tuesday nights devising, and sheer hard work, we produced *Roots* and we knew we were halfway there.

As a starting point for *Loricum*, we were given the key phrase: 'While there is still dance and time', and were introduced to the characters of Tom and Amy. From that we created a backstory, and additional characters such as Leon the film director and Helena, the daughter of Amy. We devised, improvised, scripted and discussed until we knew these characters as if they were old friends.

Now *Loricum* is here, and I, on behalf of the Wild Nights Young Company, am writing to inform you of the hard work and pure enthusiasm that has gone into this project. We have given 100% of ourselves and I feel that this is reflected in the play. After all the laughter, the thought and the exhaustion, this is the end result and we hope that you enjoy the production, which I'm sure will be a memorable chapter in MED Theatre's history.

Laura Wilson, Wild Nights-Young Company member

THE SCENE PAINTERS

After a discussion with the playwrights, it was decided that the design for the floor canvas would be based on the theme of movement. The border pattern is a repetition of the shape found on the back of a magpie's head, the magpie being a recurrent image in the play. The central shades of blue depict the reservoirs and streams of Dartmoor. The yellows and browns represent the earth and sand.

Olivia Young and Sandy Berridge, artists

THE LEAD WRITER

The reservoir in the play is a hypothetical one, sharing characteristics with a number of different Dartmoor reservoirs, both built and unbuilt. When I was growing up on Dartmoor, the Meldon and Swincombe reservoir schemes were major topics of controversy. Fernworthy, on the other hand, was accepted as a given - for a child, an exciting stretch of water to visit, a lake. Dr Tom Greeves gave a talk and slide-show on the building of all the high Dartmoor reservoirs to the young company as part of the background research for the play, and John Weir of the Dartmoor National Park Authority provided information on the Meldon reservoir controversy.

The St Francis Dam in California was built in the 1920s by William Mulholland to provide additional water for Los Angeles. Minutes before midnight on March 12th 1928, the reservoir dam burst, sending a wall of water down the San Francisquito Canyon which killed over four hundred people. The construction was faulty, but at his trial for manslaughter Mulholland, while taking responsibility, hinted that he felt sabotage to have been the cause.

Apart from the reference to the St Francis Dam disaster, and the five live mortar rounds that ended up in a Dartmoor primary school after a field trip, all the events and characters in the play are fictitious.

This part of the Wild Nights-Young Company project began with several sessions on project management, looking at the organisational steps that were necessary to make and tour a community play to four different venues on Dartmoor. Then came the writing process, which was an elaborate one. Suffice to say that although I ended up writing the scenes from the first era and the nine young writers wrote almost all the scenes from the second era, it was an extensively collaborative activity, involving discussion and improvisation at every stage so that we all knew what the others were doing. As Laura mentions, the play began when I brought along two characters (based on experiences from my own teenage years) to a devising session one Tuesday evening. The characters were Tom and Amy, and the young company devised a scene around them quite beyond what I had anticipated. This set the pattern - everyone fed off everyone else, responding to and elaborating other writers' ideas. The characters of Leon and adult Amy with her daughter Helena came from the young playwrights, and we were off. Each scene was eventually written by an individual writer, building on the material that had been discussed and the scenes that had already been written.

The staging process has been equally collaborative, with the members of the young company using the input from professional artists to realise their vision and often taking charge at production meetings. Each writer was encouraged to have their say on how their scenes should be directed. On the choreography and the music fronts too, collaboration has been at the heart of the process, exposing the young company to all the facets of creating and putting on a community play.

Mark Beeson, playwright and director