
THE ACTORS CENTRE

Chairman's Report April 2015 - March 2016

It's that time of year when as Chairman of the Actors Centre I take to the keyboard to have a look back at the year we have had as an organisation. Technically this is my report for the year April 2015 to March 2016, but I prefer to align myself with the calendar year to make the report as current as possible.



Alan Bates Award

Finalists 2016

A great part of my desire as Chairman was to increase awareness of the Actors Centre within the profession. I have never believed that converting people who are currently working in their 30s and 40s to members of the Actors Centre was the way forward, but always thought there was great potential in the next generation of actors, and I'm incredibly pleased to say that the Actors Centre has continued to engage at the highest possible level with drama graduates throughout the year.

The flagship enterprise with which we do this is the Alan Bates Award which had its most successful year yet in 2016. With over 360 entries it was a hard fought competition and the quality was exceptionally high. After the last four or five years, it was great to be able to raise a glass to a female winner in Shauna McLean from Italia Conti. A worthy winner who caused many a moist eye at the ceremony with her heartfelt speech about just what the award meant to someone like her stepping out into the world for the first time. Alongside the Alan Bates Award, we started the second year of our mentoring scheme, "You and Me", for the six finalists. The feedback from this scheme has been phenomenal both from the finalists and from the professional actors who have mentored them. While the commitment from the mentors is only half-an-hour a month, many have spent evenings together at the

theatre, days on film sets, visits to first nights and press nights, and have even done some work together. For me this scheme sums up what I feel the Actors Centre should be all about. Sharing experiences between actors of different generations.

The Alan Bates Award was launched at our graduate event "Moving On Up" in January, now in its third year. It's great to see the building full for one evening with potential members and new faces. Actually, when I say "potential members" that has changed now due to the high level of engagement the Actors Centre is achieving with drama schools. In a programme brilliantly managed by our Membership Manager Debbie Morris, we now contact all drama schools and offer them a free one hour question-and-answer seminar as to the role the Actors Centre could play in a working actor's life. These seminars have been led by myself, fellow board member Elliott Barnes-Worrall, and I'm pleased to say, past Alan Bates Award winners Adam Buchanan, Luke Dale, and Mark Field. I would hope that Shauna will be out there to deliver a seminar on her experience as a young working actor within the next year.



Winner Shauna McLean
with Award presenter Juliet
Stevenson

These evenings are great events, taking place at various drama schools, and producing a very high level of take-up from the graduates in becoming members of the Actors Centre for the first



year of their working life at our special offer rate. The seminars are primarily offered to courses who are eligible to enter the Alan Bates Award, but with the demise of Drama UK during the year, we now accredit courses for suitability for the Bates ourselves, and I have no doubt that our level of contact with drama schools will continue to expand.

Later in the year we ran "Act Now" our graduate event held in September. This was the second year for the event in the second year of a very fruitful partnership with Samuel French. The location for the event is split between the Actors Centre itself and the Seven Dials Club in Covent Garden, which allows a series of seminars and networking events to take place on the evening. This year it was great to see the brilliant actor Denis Lawson holding a very well attended seminar on screen acting; Head of Casting at the BBC Julia Crampsie leading a great session on the requirements of her casting department; Paul Cawley from Equity offering career advice; and a make and stage your own show seminar held in the theatre and hosted by the new Producer of the Tristan Bates Theatre Matthew Keeler,



a great addition to our team during the year. The event was a great success, judging by the number of bottles of free prosecco that were drunk.

Our networking evenings for members continue to be a great success, offering a chance four times a year to meet tutors, season curators such as The Globe, and to book courses and workshops at a great discount. These events will continue to be aligned with each season of workshops.

Our lunchtime chat show "Off the Record" has not made as many appearances this year as I would have liked, due to my own professional commitments and the ongoing difficulty of guest availability, but the one guest we presented in March surely topped all previous visitors. Dame Judi Dench

took to the stage in the Grand Saloon at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane for what was a most entertaining and edifying hour and I think certainly showed everybody present just what star quality really is. Judi was very keen that her appearance should also raise money for the Actors Centre, so although we released a certain number of tickets for members at a reduced price, we placed the rest of the tickets on priority sale to members, and also some to the public. Currently we are arranging the next two chats which, fingers crossed, should have equally high-profile interviewees.



It's great to see other events go from strength to strength. Cast-a-thon continues to be heavily subscribed each time that we run it and many thanks to the casting directors who come along and give their time to see members and offer advice and help on a one-to-one basis. We also held our third annual Agent-a-thon (imaginatively titled!) which is proving equally successful. Thanks once again to all who came along on both sides of the table.

Last year I wrote of the necessity for the organisation to start fundraising given the amount of work that we must do to the building. Not just improvements, but some essential maintenance if we are not to fall foul of dreaded health and safety requirements. We are a little further on in this project, but not as far as I would have liked. It's highly unlikely that the work will take place during 2017, but the board and management are now engaging with the process and would hope that plans can be announced at some point in early 2017 as to how we will achieve this. Charcoal Blue, the excellent theatre architects undertook a brilliant feasibility study of our premises and while it was a little distressing to see the amount of work that we absolutely have to do, it was also great to be shown the potential of what we might do. All that remains now is for everybody to buy a lottery ticket every week so that we can raise the £1.5

million that would enable us to do everything we want. Either that or I just have to do another episode of “Doctors”.

I am very grateful to our continuing sponsors, such as Equity, who continue to support us as an organisation. This year saw Spotlight withdraw their financial support for us after many years to pursue other options, but they remain a supporter of the Alan Bates Award for which we are very grateful. This also means that we have the opportunity to develop relationships with other sponsors, and news of an exciting new relationship which will give us both financial help and practical assistance on a new format for the Alan Bates Award will be released early in 2017.

In any organisation, it's always necessary to refresh the balance and we said goodbye to Roberto Salvatori in October of this year after eight years as Finance and Operations Director. Harry Kinsley, who joined us only two years ago has stepped up as Operations and Building Manager and is doing a brilliant job, and we have a new Finance Officer in Humphrey Waterhouse who has recently joined the team.

The board also welcomed some new members during the year. Dawn Farrow, the Managing Director and Founder of Boom Ents, the theatre and live event marketing company is a great addition to the team, as is Ian Nicol. Ian trained and worked as an actor before moving into the area of HR and working in the upper echelons of the BBC and government. His expertise in both areas has proved invaluable to us. Just recently we are very pleased to have welcomed on board Fay Castelow, currently appearing with the RSC, to maintain the balance of actors and professionals on the board.

In September it was an absolute joy to welcome Indira Varma and Joseph Millson as our new patrons. Two incredibly well respected actors, who both have the values of the Actors Centre close to their heart. Joe has endowed his own bursary, which ran in October for its second year. Aimed at people aged 22 or over who may have missed the chance to go to drama school, the bursary gives the recipient the chance to take part in two of the Actors Centre's public courses. Thanks to an additional very generous donation, this year the Joseph Millson Bursary was given to one male and one female recipient, and both Olu Adaeze and Marko Vujnovic will be taking up their bursaries early in 2017.

In everything we do at the Actors Centre we are very dependent on our staff, a small tightly knit team who work over and above the line of duty in order for us to achieve such a splendid list of events. Saying thank you isn't enough, but the thanks do come from the bottom of my heart for every extra hour they put in for the benefit of our members and for the good of the organisation.

Like so many arts organisations at the moment we cannot stand still. To standstill is to fall backwards. We have to constantly move forward. We have to ask ourselves difficult questions. Given that we have five studios and a theatre in the building, do we sometimes offer too much content? Do we offer enough guest tutors whose workshops sell out? Are we engaging with as many members as we possibly can? Are we doing all we can to make the organisation valid in 2016? I can't definitely answer yes to all these questions, but what I can say is that I and my fellow board members work as hard as we can to ensure that the organisation is as successful as

possible. The board, who all give their time voluntarily, strive to make the organisation something we can all be truly proud of.

So to our staff, the board, the members, and to the many people who have supported us in any way whatsoever this year, I say thank you. I look forward to the future, whatever it may bring, and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in the building itself.

Paul Clayton

