

# **Barred Voices**

**Perspectives on Theatre in Prisons in the UK**

**A report by Escape Artists**

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## **Preface**

The normal public presentation of prisons in the press is of a negative and dangerous environment appropriate only for the punishment of the wicked.

This media view of prisons misses much of the complexity and emotional content of the prison world. Although imprisonment is rightly a punishment for those who have broken the law, the need to protect the public creates a strong imperative to work with prisoners to reduce the risk that they will present on release. For prison to be successful in containing prisoners and helping them to prepare for release, there needs to be real concern about how prisoners can be kept safe from each other and find ways of enduring without damage the physical and psychological deprivations which are an inevitable part of incarceration.

Before coming to prison, very few prisoners have made the best use of the educational system to develop their potential and many have come from disturbed and difficult backgrounds and therefore bring with them many unresolved problems.

To break free of crime and become successful, many prisoners have to reinvent themselves and find a whole new way of looking at the world and realising their potential. This can only be done if they can confront their past and draw on the often hard lessons they have learnt to find a new way of operating positively and successfully.

This summary of what can be achieved by engaging prisoners in the performing arts highlights one of the successful ways of unlocking that potential and drawing on their own harsh experiences to find ways of expressing themselves and developing a real voice. In short, a transformational experience.

**PHIL WHEATLEY**  
**Director General of the Prison Service**

## Overview

### Theatre in prisons in the UK<sup>1</sup>: models and methodologies

*Barred Voices* set out to describe the models used by theatre practitioners working within the criminal justice sector in the UK. During the process of gathering research, however, it became evident that the theoretical models are often too general and too limited to be descriptively useful. Although they provide a perspective, they do not capture the creativity and innovation evident in the field. *Barred Voices* therefore uses models of practice as a backdrop rather than foreground, and overlays them with in depth descriptions of some of the best theatre practice in the UK.

#### *Research methods*

Two methods of research were involved in compiling the report. The first involved gathering written material – books, articles, annual reports, research reports, dissertations and various other forms of textual information available on the internet. Since there is a paucity of writing about prison theatre in the UK, the second method involved gather fresh data through interviews. Company directors, theatre practitioners, prison staff, academics, facilitators, educators and ex-prisoners were interviewed. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Excerpts are quoted liberally throughout the report, and are a testimony to the vitality of the sector.

#### *Wheels, spectrums and other models*

It can be useful to think of models of practice as emanating from a wheel-like structure with the client in the centre. The spokes represent the models, and link the client with the practitioner.

The first spoke could be arts-based practice, although this is a broad and contentious category. Since ‘all arts are created in some kind of social context’, Simon Ruding, the Director of TiPP (Theatre in Prisons and Probation Centres), suggested that it could refer to ‘a highly skilled arts practitioner who goes and works in an institution with no real interest in promoting social or individual outcomes’.

Chris Johnston of Rideout argued that this category is ‘not for arts sake at all - it’s for the sake of the practitioners’. He suggested that instead you could think of ‘purely creative projects which are about the output of artistic products [at one end] and then at the other end, projects about behavioural change and behavioural understanding. You don’t want to try and apply it to everything though,’ he warned, ‘because some purely artistic projects create extraordinary behavioural changes in the participants and some projects designed to create behavioural change don’t work at all and don’t create behavioural change but might possibly generate some interesting art works along the way’.

The second spoke of the wheel could be dramatherapy. In James Thompson’s *Prison Theatre*, one of the first books to describe the work of theatre practitioners in prisons, Sally Stamp draws attention to the difficulties of defining this category, pointing out how even the British Association of drama therapists has a couple of definitions.

‘Johnson states: Dramatherapy, like any other arts therapies (arts, music and dance), is application of a creative medium to psychotherapy. (Johnson 1980, p.159-160)... The Whitley Council says that a dramatherapist is: a person who is responsible for organizing appropriate programmes of drama activities of a therapeutic application with patients, individually or in groups, and possesses a degree or qualification considered equivalent for the entry to an accepted post-graduate training course and also a qualification in dramatherapy following the completion of an accepted course at a recognized institution for higher or further education. (DHSS1991)... but it is not just the qualification itself that is important. It is also the experiencing of the dramatherapy process so the therapist will have some knowledge themselves of what their clients will experience’. (Johnston, 1998, 91).

While many of the companies included in this report have a therapeutic aspect to their work, *Barred Voices* does not include the work of dramatherapists. Dramatherapy is a field in its own right, requiring specific training, practice methods and qualifications. It is beyond the remit of this report to describe and compare it to other drama/theatre practice in prisons.

The last two spokes emanating from the wheel would relate to the social and educational realms. The first of these could represent applied theatre and drama, with its offshoots of issue-based drama and sociodrama. The second could be a divided spoke representing theatre in education and drama in education, with their offshoots of key skills, skills training and accredited learning.

An alternative model could be illustrated in a spectrum ranging from primary therapy to primary arts. Simon Ruding adapted such a model from Martin Ringer ([www.martinringer.com](http://www.martinringer.com)), a management consultant and group work trainer. In the centre of the spectrum is adjunctive therapy, which is where Simon would place TiPP’s work. He describes adjunctive therapy projects as being ‘designed to have some form of broad or specific social or individual outcome. We have social change agendas in mind when we’re creating things, individual change agendas when we’re creating projects. But we come from a grounded tradition in primary arts practice... it’s about project design and the specific skills of the facilitators... what that means in terms of theatre practice is to constantly work one step removed’.

Jenny Hughes describes six models of arts interventions in her relevant literature review, *Doing the Arts Justice* (2005). These involve: arts to enrich the prison curriculum; arts education; arts as therapeutic interventions; arts as adjunctive therapy; arts for participation and citizenship; and arts as a cultural right. In addition, Jenny describes the established explanatory models which can be used with regard to the impact of the arts. These are cognitive behavioural theory; role theory/social learning theory; resiliency theory; social capital theory; learning theory; intelligence theories; and arts therapies. (*Doing the Arts Justice*, 2005, 57).

*Doing the Arts Justice* provides a rigorous theoretical overview of arts in the criminal justice sector, which can be particularly useful for practitioners with regard to funding and evaluating their work. Yet, this review notes that, ‘the separation of ‘instrumental’ value and ‘true’ art is not valid or useful. It does not reflect exciting activity across the sector which shows creativity has instrumental outcomes for individuals and society.’ (*Doing the Arts Justice*, 2005, 52).

### *Responsive models*

During the research of *Barred Voices*, it became evident that much of this ‘exciting activity’ is borne directly from a sensitive response to the needs of clients by practitioners. Although practitioners work within frameworks, on the whole, these are not as broad or generalised as the theoretical models would imply. To again quote Jenny Hughes, ‘So much of research is about finding general models that work across different contexts, while the arts world works in the opposite direction in many ways.’

Andy Watson of Geese emphasised that although the company’s work is strongly underpinned by theory and research, ‘We don’t try and create replicas of each other... if this group needs to see a piece of theatre that we don’t have, we do it, create it - and that’s where we get our work from. Then you come back and say I did this great thing or this was a real nightmare. And by sitting in the office, it’s not even a model of practice, it’s just an idea, this worked, or this didn’t work but I think it could. That’s where a lot of our development work happens, in sessions.’

Many of the most innovative practitioners expressed with passion, and sometimes anger, the need for prisoners’ voices to be heard. They expressed the need to work in a situation-specific manner in order for this to happen. They expressed fundamental commitment to change and the necessity for flexibility to enable this change.

Listening to the practitioners, more than common models and methodologies, common values emerged. The value spoken of most frequently was that of being humane, bringing something humane into the prisoners’ lives, as well as into the criminal justice system.

### *Cultural Competency*

Although many problems within the criminal justice system need to be addressed, the issue of racism cannot go without mention. Statistically it is clearly evident<sup>ii</sup> and speaking to black practitioners and ex-prisoners, it stood out as particularly shocking and rife.

For theatre practitioners, this implies the need to be culturally competent in order not to perpetuate racist assumptions. Cultural competency goes further than a sensitive response. It ‘emphasises the idea of *effectively* operating in different cultural contexts. Knowledge, sensitivity, and awareness do not include this crucial factor. To move into competency is to go beyond awareness or sensitivity.’ (B4E project)<sup>iv</sup>.

Sandra Hall of Friction Arts spoke of how their success lay in cultural competency – the company’s integration with the community - rather than in any particular model. Their seeming luck in drawing practitioners from the community is evidently linked to prioritising ease of access, for example by having a walk-in ‘shop’ on a council estate. The clients and practitioners who come to their sessions determine Friction Art’s models. The work that emerges is fresh and open: most recently the company used drama sessions to create a graphic novel *Tagged*.

Any model of theatre practice in prisons used by Martin Glynn, director of Sankofa Associates, is built on the principle of peer-led cultural competency. He says, 'There is no real commitment within a community context to resettle black men back into the community and use arts as a basis of keeping them out of prison. A black man in prison does not have the same lived reality as a white man, even on class basis, so the ideology and framing is flawed... if you're going to engage him as a theatre provider, you have to engage on those cultural norms that he relates to.... I'm developing a model of good practice around peer led cultural competency, capacity building for hard to access young black people. So if I develop a model and it works, then that's my model.'

### *In practice*

*Barred Voices* discusses various models, methodologies and typologies in direct relation to theatre practitioners and their work. Importantly, it attempts to give space to the ideas and voices of the practitioners - what they are saying about their work, needs and processes. Overwhelmingly evident and fascinating is how the best practice keeps the client at the centre - despite the pressures of evaluation, justification, funding and accreditation, and regardless of the model of work employed.

'It's about building up relationships based on trust and being aware not only of how you view the client but of how you might be viewed by the client', says Richmond Trew, an arts practitioner and trainer who has worked extensively in the field, largely with Insight Arts. 'Your perceptions of the client and the client's of you need to be as close as possible to prevent misunderstandings - and this is dependent on how well you are able to engage.... You have to work with the guys, and you may move away from all of your briefs and still meet an objective because they enjoy it and you engage them. Familiarise yourself with how the client group takes on information.'

### *In context*

*Barred Voices* was written as part of a broader Socrates Project comparing experiences of theatre practice in prisons across several European countries. Through selection of 'best practices in the field', the project aimed to find a 'common model' and from this to determine 'common methodologies' (Socrates Project description).

It is evident, however, that the strength in the sector comes from committed, diverse and context-specific approaches. Escape Artists doesn't believe that there is a single reductive model of drama practice in prisons that can provide an evaluative measure for creativity and personal development. Rather, Director Matthew Taylor argued for a meta-model of practice focusing on access, support and sustainability: 'Our job is to provide the context within which the arts - of whatever kind, using whatever model - can flourish, and, furthermore, to provide support, through 'the bridge', to those socially marginalized people, who wish to pursue their interest in the arts.'

Referring to broader issues of policy and funding, Matthew continued, 'We are not against models of practice - we just want to ensure that drama never becomes a sterile exercise used as a convenient bolt-on designed to ease the assimilation of 'messages', or 'learning outcomes', delivered from 'on high'. What people do with the arts, the impact that the arts have on their lives, is unpredictable and shouldn't form the basis

on which arts services are measured and funded. As arts providers, rather than constantly justifying what we do in terms of measurable outcomes, we should be holding our democratically elected leaders to account, and asking them ‘what are you doing to ensure that everyone has access to their culture?’

*In conclusion*

Finally, in these times when measurable outcomes however undesirable are unavoidable, *Barred Voices* also attempts to celebrate the immeasurable outcomes fundamental to work in the arts: the joy, the warmth and the unforgettable experiences that make at least moments worthwhile if not lives.

## Geese Theatre Company

‘Geese Theatre Company is a team of internationally renowned BAFTA and Butler Trust Award winning theatre practitioners working exclusively within the Criminal Justice System. The company designs and delivers active, experiential drama and theatre based groupwork interventions for offenders in prisons, secure hospitals and community settings throughout the world. Since 1987, Geese has worked in more than 150 custodial institutions, with 42 Probation areas and with more than 100,000 offenders.’

In general terms, Geese could be described as an applied theatre company working within the criminal justice system with offenders. Beyond that, the limitations of the models outlined in the overview become evident. Although it would be inaccurate to define Geese’s work by any of the category definitions, project by project the categories can be referred to if regarded descriptively rather than definitively, with boundaries that overlap.

Geese is not a traditional drama/theatre in education company, for example, though it delivers skills training and skills practice. The project, Guttled, a three day prison residency for male offenders, which focuses on issues of fatherhood and parenting, uses skills practice. Anti-modelling and a form of forum theatre are used to improve parenting skills and the project has been highlighted by the DfES Offender Learning and Skills Unit as ‘an innovative approach to address the issues of parenting within a prison setting’. (Annual Report, 2005, 5).

For external practitioners, Geese offers: ‘1. In-house training funded by (not designed by) Probation or other Services for their own staff. 2. Courses open to individual members of the public. “The Other Side of the Wall” is a three-day course for those working with offenders and youth at risk. 3. Role plays for staff training events e.g. Accredited Probation Sex Offender Programmes’. (Annual Report, 2005, 8).

Internally, Geese staff are given a 6-month probation period, although their unofficial training period is closer to two years. They observe and are observed, complete a self-directed group work learning module, read core texts and familiarise themselves with the theories underpinning the company’s work.

On the therapy side, Geese do not identify themselves as dramatherapists or psychodramatists, although their work could be described as therapeutic. The group work inputs with sex offenders, for example, usually have cognitive behavioural theory as their basis with an underlying tenet of attachment theory. A recent project in partnership with Oxleas Hospital and Bracton Centre involved using theatre-based programmes for people with a diagnosed personality disorder. As a result of this, the Home Office and Department of Health has commissioned Geese to do more work with people with personality disorders. Unlike therapy, however, Geese’s work is often ‘one step removed’: practitioners may use techniques such as the frozen picture, for example, to explore notions of attachment in a safe and an unsafe family.

Geese would not call themselves sociodramatists because they are not specifically trained as such, although they are involved in sociodrama. Re-Connect, for example, is a project which uses ‘theatrical performance and participatory work to explore

issues concerning resettlement and the transition from custody to community' (Annual Report, 2005, 4) and the Lifer Show, performed for lifers and their families, was 'a performance which would explore some of the specific issues for offenders serving a life sentence who are getting close to release (Annual Report, 2005, 4). Geese also does work concerning human rights and giving excluded groups a voice - such as The Looked After Children Project, which is concerned with young people's experience of the care system.

Andy Watson, Director of Geese, describes the basic principles behind their work as being 'those of choice and the possibility of change, working with individuals and their responsibility for their own behaviour to affect change within themselves'. Although responsivity is key - 'we never fully know what we're going to do with a group until we meet them' - the methods used to explore these principles are theatre, drama and active methods.

Active methods may involve using the language of theatre or role play, but are essentially about getting people on their feet and enabling physical responses to questions or stimulus. A simple example of an active method would be to pose a question to participants which provoked a range of responses on a continuum from agree to disagree, and then to ask them to answer it by physically placing themselves in a line.

Particularly characteristic of Geese's work is the use of mask and metaphor. The concept of mask, as a coping strategy or 'front', allows participants to explore their own presenting behaviours and what lies beneath. The notion of roles, (linked to work on mask) and the expansion of participants' 'role repertoire' is explored through role-play.

Theatre, as well as role-play, is used to focus on specific issues relevant to offenders. Approximately every two years, Geese devises an issue-based performance piece for this purpose. Journey Woman, a full-mask piece with a soundtrack, is the company's most recent show. Created specifically for women offenders, and in consultation with women inmates from HMP Brockhill, it tells an archetypal story that spans from childhood - through abusive partners, educational failure, prison sentences and having children - to the point where the narrator recognises the need for change.

Journey Women explores the multiple roles of female offenders from the basis of role theory. The primary metaphor is a blanket, which represents negative coping strategies (such as using heroin and self harm). The masks are relatively neutral and by omitting dialogue the participants are able to project their own story onto the mime. The performance and its metaphors provide stimulus for a week of workshops focusing on goals, new coping strategies and specific skills practice. Women recruited for the programme are required to be at some level of contemplation about their behaviour. The Journey Women residency ends with each participant presenting an individual piece of work highlighting positives and encouraging self-efficacy.

With regard to the evaluation of their work, Andy acknowledged both the importance of evaluation in the sector and its inherent difficulties. There are shortages of resources (time and funds) and samples are small. In 2004/5 Geese's work with 1210 inmates, spending 100 days in prison, was evaluated using an adapted version of the

DfES Offender Learning and Skills Unit self assessment checklist. Psychological evaluation based on attitudinal and behavioural change was carried out on 55 men involved in a nine-day programme on anger and violence over the last three years. Andy emphasised that 'getting the work right from our perspective is what we concentrate on - knowing that what we're doing has had lots of input at the front end to ensure that it's safe, that it's theoretically rigorous and has artistic integrity. That is what is important to us'.

Andy Watson is the Artistic Director of Geese. The company usually employs around 10 full-time staff members and 7 ex-company freelance workers, working predominantly in prisons and in conjunction with the Probation Service.

## Rideout

Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation) specialises in ‘the creation and facilitation of drama, theatre and multi-arts projects for serving prisoners of all ages’. (2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report & Audited Accounts, 2005, 2).

The company was formed in 1998, when Chris Johnston contacted Saul Hewish about a potential opportunity to work at Swinfen Hall. They wrote a proposal and were offered a contract to provide regular input into the programme at Swinfen. It was important to both practitioners to be involved in innovative, experimental work, in projects which were ‘a little bit more adventurous’, as Chris put it. For the first few years, they were involved in other freelance work and the company existed only when they worked together at Swinfen.

Rideout’s work at Swinfen comprised workshops concerned largely with lifestyle changes, developing social and communication skills and learning about anger management. They used drama games, exercises and improvisations both to teach the skills and to provide experiential testing of the skills learnt.

In terms of a spectrum with purely creative projects at one end, the Swinfen projects are located with those that have a clear agenda around behavioural change. ‘The artistic output is not as important as the changes in perception and understanding engineered by the processes we employ during the project,’ Chris explained, ‘And those are linked to programmes that the prison is already running.’

While at Swinfen Hall, Chris and Saul became interested finding a context for Boal’s idea of ‘manipulating human sculptures and so having a conversation about the relationship between the actual and the possible’ ([www.e-mailout.org/cams/htm](http://www.e-mailout.org/cams/htm)). Together with an angry young prisoner, they drew an Anger Machine. They then dramatised it, discussing how it was powered and the consequences of its power, and used it to explore ways in which the man’s aggression could be controlled.

The idea developed into a project involving 3-D kinetic sculptures related to offending. A year later, 25 of these sculptures were exhibited in the foyer of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Since the inmates could not visit the theatre, Rideout made a virtual gallery CD-Rom of the exhibition called ‘Repeating Stories’.

Rideout is still involved in experiential work at Swinfen. They work with graduates from the substance abuse and the anger management courses and teach social skills to offenders with learning disabilities. Periodically they are also involved in special projects, such as an induction video which they made with prisoners to explain the prison system from the prisoners’ perspective.

Following the success of the Repeating Stories project, Rideout received regular arts funding – ‘the holy grail of arts funding’ as Saul described it - and entered into a partnership with Dovegate HMP. Here Rideout was involved more at the arts-based end of the arts spectrum, making plays and films with prisoners.

Dovegate is split into a regular prison and a therapeutic community. Being a private prison, through contracts with private business, prisoners can earn GBP40 a week in a

palette-making workshop. This is problematic since there isn't parity with education, for which inmates are paid only GBP12.50 a week. Rideout's work in the regular prison was in the education department where there was very little incentive for involvement and it was felt that their work could be put to better use in the therapeutic community.

The therapeutic community at Dovegate operates entirely separately from the regular prison. The ethos is that the community is responsible for all that happens within it and there is a strong desire to create a culture of art. Although Rideout's work at Dovegate for the most part involved devised performance work and training in creative leadership skills, evaluator Kate Goodrich wrote, 'it is apparent that both staff and residents saw this work as part of a much bigger and holistic process of therapy and rehabilitation'. (*The Means of Production*, 2005, 1)

The Creative Leadership Skills Course was intended to provide both formal tutoring on how to run an arts project and skills that would be useful in the broader community and other professional roles. 'Whilst only approximately 50% of residents said that they would go on to use their drama related skills directly in the future, most people felt that they had made personal gains during the project which had had an impact for them in therapy or in their general well being'. (*The Means of Production*, 2005, 1).

Kate Goodrich noted that although participants understood that the drama work was not therapy, they appreciated the positive impact it had on them in the community. A number of staff, however, appeared to be 'concerned that they did not fully understand the aims and rationale of Rideout's work and felt uncomfortable about being unsure about where the work would be placed on the arts-therapy spectrum of practice'.

Since the work was evidently appreciated by practitioners and participants, this disjuncture possibly points to the questionable value of the spectrum and the difficulties inherent in evaluation. <sup>v</sup>As Chris Johnston argued, 'There aren't any clearly defined methodologies.... What you've got is a bunch of pragmatists drawing on a range of different methodologies and fashioning something themselves'.

Rideout's most recent project at Gartree Prison demonstrates just how broad the scope of this 'something' can be. The Creative Prison is 'a multi-arts and architecture project for life sentence prisoners at HMP Gartree'. It involves prisoners, prison staff, artists and architects, including Will Alsop, in the conceptualization and design of 'an imagined prison – a prison which, whilst not ignoring security concerns, sets education, training and rehabilitation as its core function.' (Annual Report, p.7)

Excitingly, the project is sponsored by Wates Construction Ltd, one of the preferred Prison Service contractors. This means that the prison will be realistically costed, and that while the entire prison may not be built, elements emerging from the consultation with prisoners may well influence future prison design. 'It's having an impact on the system in a very different way to the standard way we've tried to impact on it,' said Saul.

The Creative Prison Project illustrates how Rideout puts the notion of being radical into practice. According to Chris, being radical when working with prisons involves

‘an arrangement with them where we’re able to propose projects. So rather than being asked to do things, which we are occasionally, we propose a project to them. And possibly raise the money to do it. Because we’ve got a prior relationship with that prison, as is the case sometimes, then that makes it easier to get that idea accepted.’

In terms of the art form, it entails ‘mixing the art forms in some kind of way or using them in a slightly diff way. Or we’re presenting them in a slightly different place or the process is slightly unusual’.

In terms of criminal justice issues, being radical means ‘trying to be provocative in ways that take the criminal justice system by surprise... we’re asking the prisoners to design a prison, which has obviously never been done before, so that’s a provocation to the system. To consider what it is, what is the function of prison architecture and to consider that the consumers of that product should be consulted as they are in almost every other form of life.’

Chris reiterated that in each project, the methodologies used are particular to that specific project – although there are common values underpinning all of Rideout’s work. ‘The values are essentially humanist values about the ability of every individual to be creative, the ability of every individual to change their patterns of behaviour, to make a contribution to society, to be involved in relationships of both rights and responsibilities with their community, the idea that a project run democratically is probably more socially fruitful than a project which is run in an authoritarian way.’

Chris spoke of how when practitioners impose a structure, there is an assertion of values, since there is no such thing as a value-free structure. He emphasised the need for practitioners to ‘be as clear as you can about what your objective is at any one time.’

In addition to the need for clarity of purpose, Saul spoke of the importance in being aware of how your work will be interpreted by prisoners and prison staff. ‘Practitioners need to understand the environment they’re going to work in. You need to respect it even though you won’t agree with it, otherwise you will mess it up for others. Prison is a very conservative environment.... People can learn a lot about themselves and possibilities, but I wouldn’t stand up and say that you’re going to change people’s lives forever.... You cannot save everyone and that’s not what it’s about.’

The core of Rideout is Chris Johnston and Saul Hewish. They work with a pool of about a dozen freelancers, as well as new practitioners from a theatre in the community module taught by Saul at the University of Warwick. The company has run one-day training workshops as part of the Anne Peaker Centre for Arts in Criminal Justice training course.

## Safe Ground

Safe Ground ‘uses drama, video and English literature to develop the key skills and future prospects of male prisoners and young people throughout the UK.... the charity has a track record for producing high-quality, peer-led education programmes that motivate the most resistant learners.’

([http://www.a4offenders.org.uk/new/sections/publications/publication\\_pdfs/directories/directory2002/directory2002\\_2.pdf](http://www.a4offenders.org.uk/new/sections/publications/publication_pdfs/directories/directory2002/directory2002_2.pdf))

Antonia Rubinstein and Polly Freeman established Safe Ground in 1991, with the vision of creating theatre by the people for the people. Their approach was experimental, learning through trial and error. They would work in 5 or 10 day spurts, observing and modifying in order to accommodate changes in the behaviour of the prisoners, the strictures of the prison regime and the integrity of the group.

Initially, the company was on the arts-for-art’s-sake side of the spectrum, although its work was informed by education. Typically, a classic English literature text would be used as the starting point. The prisoners would interpret it and something original would be created. Safe Ground also worked with puppets, using puppetry at its most sophisticated level, with lighting, costumes and music worthy of a miniature West End production.

In 1999, however, Safe Ground’s work took on a new direction. The company was commissioned by the Prison Service to create a framework for the delivery of Parenting and Family Relationships Education and Key Skills. Following its success, between 1999 and 2002, Safe Ground was given the opportunity to collaborate with OLSU, prisoners and staff to develop the Family Man course, and then its brother course, Fathers Inside.

Each of these courses involved using drama as a delivery tool to motivate and educate. The courses provide accreditation in adult literacy, key skills and social life skills. The challenge, and the difference between Safe Ground’s work and that of the other theatre companies in this report, lay in devising courses that could be duplicated in prisons throughout the country and taught effectively by members of prison staff, rather than by the company themselves.

In devising the courses, Antonia realised the need ‘to strip back down to empty space, to fundamentals, to how do you get a group of men – how do tutors, because we’re not a part of it anymore – to do an original presentation where nascent creativity can start to shine’. Their approach was along the lines of Commedia del’arte or jazz: to provide a very structured, clear framework within which participants could find their own place and ways of expression. Their manuals for the facilitating staff bear a resemblance to a Delia Smith cookery book, breaking the process down into steps as well as describing the strategies behind the games and exercises.

Antonia describes one of the first exercises in the manual, ‘On the theme of using words, this exercise involves giving the men words and definitions. They’ve got three minutes to go around and find a partner (the definition of their word), so you’ve broken up the cliques. Then they have to present the word, tell us the word and definition, introduce themselves, do it gracefully and elegantly and exit in the same

way. So you give these basic instructions, and what usually happens is the guys overcomplicate it. There are ten words and they're numbered so there's no 'who is going first' - you want to cut down opportunities for fights and wasting time... They go up quivering and shaking and you get the audience to constructively comment on how they could do it better. They're learning the basic rules of stage craft: use of voice, height, ways of entering... so this exercise introduces a palette of things that any performer needs to be aware of and they remember it. And you refer back to it throughout the course'.

According to Antonia, some theatre practitioners would criticise the degree of structure to their courses claiming that it stunts creativity. In defence, she argues, 'Is what you're doing a laboratory experiment or is it something that someone else will find interesting? We wanted to give the men the skills to say you can communicate and be listened to and have an audience who will take you seriously. We can empower you so that you can walk out of the room transformed by the experience, so that people will see you in a different way and you can use those skills in other settings.... Because ultimately drama involves communication and these men have very poor powers of communication.'

Alison Jones, Family Man and Fathers Inside Network Coordinator, describes how Safe Ground's sessions are about 'freedom and empowering the students and letting their imagination go and creating a space that is safe for them to be imaginative. That's the classic tension, isn't it? If you're going to do arts in prison, you're automatically challenging authority because that's the carnival element of arts, that's what the arts are, they are carnival, they are anti-authoritarian. And so you release people's imaginative shackles and say we are now tapping into your vitality and creativity and imagination, off you go. Where do you set the limits? The place that we've set them has been within the context of the family relationships and the parenting educational project. But that's a commissioning brief...'

'But arts is not just carnival,' adds Antonia, 'it's also about enquiry, making people ask questions. That's not what they want in the prison system but that's what we wanted to do. We wanted the prisoners to think: why did I like that, could I have a bit of that, why is my life the way it is, can theatre change my life? Can theatre be really political, has theatre the capacity to change or does it just reflect... and that's what we're interested in, how we can use theatre to actually change attitudes.'

Safe Ground's courses essentially provide a script and the success of delivery does, to an extent, depend on the commitment and imagination of the facilitators. On the other hand, although Safe Ground comprises only 4 members of staff, their intensive courses can reach 1500 prisoners a year. Antonia regards working with the Prison Service and the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit as a means to getting drama into prisons and breaking down barriers to the arts. 'We set out to reform. That's not necessarily what the prison officers thought - they thought we were very safe - but actually what's going on is like paint on the floor going further and further and leaving a stain. And it's fuelled by our belief in the transforming impact of drama.'

Safe Ground comprises four members of staff: Antonia Rubinstein - Safe Ground Director; Eleanor Robertson - Family Man/Fathers Inside Co-ordinator; Alison Jones

– Family Man/Fathers Inside Network Co-ordinator; and Charles Palmer – Business Development.

‘The company aims to produce original creative work to a high professional standard that complements the HM Prison Service Statement of Purpose; promote a responsible and crime-free approach to life; collaborate with prison staff in the development of key skills and future prospects of prisoners; provide prisoners with an opportunity to practise taking responsibility for others.’

([http://www.a4offenders.org.uk/new/sections/publications/publication\\_pdfs/directories/directory2002/directory2002\\_2.pdf](http://www.a4offenders.org.uk/new/sections/publications/publication_pdfs/directories/directory2002/directory2002_2.pdf))

## Clean Break

'Clean Break is the UK's only women's theatre education and new writing company for ex-offenders, prisoners, ex-prisoners and women at risk of offending due to drug or alcohol use or mental health issues. Clean Break produces theatre which engages audiences in the issues faced by women whose lives have been affected by the criminal justice system.' ([www.apcentre.org.uk](http://www.apcentre.org.uk))

Founded in 1979 by two women in Askham Grange Prison, Clean Break was one of the first theatre companies to work with prisoners in the UK. It aimed to provide a 'powerful and unique voice for women prisoners and ex-offenders' (REClaim North West, 2005, 1).

Initially, Clean Break's work was on the arts-based side of spectrum, as a touring theatre company with plays written, acted in and produced by women ex-offenders. Then in the early nineties, it became a registered charity and began to receive regular Arts Council funding. The company had matured and several changes were made. One of these was to professionalize Clean Break's productions. Rather than providing direct opportunities for ex-prisoners, their primary role became that of public mouthpiece for the company.

Clean Break started commissioning a playwright on an annual basis to do a creative residency in a female prison. From this, she would write a play pertaining to issues experienced by women in the criminal justice system. It would be produced with professional actresses and tour nationally to theatre venues and prisons.

In 2005, *Mercy Fine* by Shelley Silas toured to four women's prisons. It focused on issues of resettlement and ran an accompanying workshop to examine these issues. Since Clean Break was only in each prison for a day, the focus of the workshop was on positive outcomes for the future. Although, as Anna Hermann, Head of Education, pointed out, the company has come under criticism for not having ex-offenders in its productions, as a mouthpiece for the company the plays succeed. *Mercy Fine* was well reviewed as 'a clever, engaging and ultimately enlightening play about the slippery concepts of freedom, guilt and personal responsibility' (Time Out quoted from <http://www.cleanbreak.org.uk/text/txtprod1.htm>).

Another change in the early nineties was that Clean Break started running education and training programmes. These are community-based provisions for women with a criminal justice background and women at risk. For the most part, they comprise accredited, skills-based courses although Clean Break runs more therapeutic programmes too, such as Women and Anger, created by Theresa Holman.

The Women and Anger Programme was developed 'to enable women to better communicate their anger, so as to reduce the likelihood of harm to themselves or others in the community.' ([http://www.joiningthedots.co.uk/site/project\\_women.htm](http://www.joiningthedots.co.uk/site/project_women.htm)). When it was initiated in 1998, 'accredited programmes were becoming prevalent in probation practice and 'legacy' programmes such as the Women and Anger programme were ceasing to be delivered.' (REClaim North West, 2005, 1)

REClaim North West's evaluation of the programme describes it as being underpinned by cognitive behavioural methods and social learning theory, drawing on the Transtheoretical Model while intervening in the steps - from precontemplation to contemplation to preparation followed by action and then maintenance – that bring about change.

Although this theory is useful in terms of the Women and Anger Programme, the models identified are not applicable to the company as a whole. Anna was emphatic that there is no single model for Clean Break. 'The model is being holistic,' explained Anna. 'We try to respond to meeting the multiple needs of the women that we're working with, using the arts in whatever way we can to do that.'

Responding to these needs begins with creating a safe space for women. In a literal sense, Clean Break's premises are welcoming and attractive. The courtyard has been designed and transformed into an urban garden by the women themselves. 'The space being nurturing and supportive offers a quality of development that infuses whatever we do,' says Anna.

On a metaphorical level, the women are given a space in which their voices can be heard with respect and without judgement. Clean Break runs courses such as the Life Stories Course and the Performance Poetry Course, which provide opportunities for women to write and speak their own stories, and for them to be heard. Anna recalls one of the Life Stories students saying that 'what had been most poignant to her about coming here and telling her story was the realisation that her story has some validity and is worth her writing and worth being told. That is fundamental – that every woman's story is unique and deserves to be heard and told.'

Although having a voice and realising the validity of your story is central to empowerment, in order to be able to write and change that story there are practical issues that need to be addressed. As Anna explains, Clean Break takes a pragmatic approach, 'In terms of a model, the theatre and arts is central but without the support, without making the courses accessible by making them free, by the childcare and lunch being paid, without the two full-time staff members who are there to provide support, to be a listening ear, all those fundamental things... the model is that the theatre isn't in itself enough – a whole structure is needed'.

Clean Break's prospectus is distributed through prisons, probation, drug and alcohol centres, mental health settings, youth offending teams and by outreach visits and word of mouth. As well as developing their personal, social, creative and professional skills, Clean Break helps women with advocacy and issues of welfare, benefits and rights.

Many of the women who attend Clean Break are looking for a support structure rather than a professional career in the arts. The company has supported work placements for women who are not yet ready for work. They also have a job club in partnership with CAST to develop work skills and assist with practical issues related to employment. In addition to this, they work in partnership with many other organisations in order to provide a solid and sustainable support structure. Sustainability is key to creating meaningful change, and so Clean Break maintains an

elastic relationship with clients: they can leave and come back, the company is there for them to rely on.

The women who come to Clean Break do so voluntarily. Through participation in the arts combined with strong, practical and sustainable support, the company aims to build up their confidence. 'They're at a point where they're making a decision that they want something for themselves and they're going to prioritise change for themselves,' says Anna. 'So they're bringing the resources and that's very rewarding because you're just providing an environment for women who're really hungry for their own self development and progression. They're bringing that sense of *I do want something different for myself*, that seed of realisation. Sometimes it's very quiet and hidden and inward, but within 12 weeks they're performing and smiling and blossoming.'

The staff at Clean Break are: Tracey Anderson - Education Manager (Short courses and progression routes); Imogen Ashby - Education Manager (Accredited Courses); Bendy Ashfield - Production Manager; Ella Bullingham - Student Support Worker; Tracey Daley - Education Assistant; Won Fyfe - Finance Administrator; Anna Herrmann - Head of Education; Sam McNeil - Office Administrator; Lucy Morrison - Head of New Writing; Sarah Nixey - New Writing Assistant; Lucy Perman - Executive Director; Esther Poyer - Executive Assistant; Helen Pringle - Administrative Producer; Jackie Stewart - Student Support Manager; Jo Whitehouse - Girls and Young Women's Worker.

## **Martin Glynn and Sankofe Associates**

‘Working in prisons is a deeply personal and important part of my own development as a Black man, where there is the need to connect with those forgotten and invisible voices who, despite their crimes, come from the same cultural, political, and social bond as myself’. (Martin Glynn in *Prison Theatre. Practices and Perspectives* – James Thompson, p171)

Martin Glynn became involved with prison work in the early 1980s. He came from a background of activism but, as a fellow activist told him, ‘if you wanted to do real activism work with black people you needed to start with the prison because that’s where most of us were.’ (Martin Glynn, Interview Dec 2005).

Martin started by writing to prisoners and then began setting up arts-based residencies in prisons. The turning point came in the mid-eighties when he was asked to run a residency with a group of volatile black prisoners in Longlarten. Although Martin hadn’t gone to prisons to deal with the arts but rather ‘to engage black men’, this residency introduced him to the need for transformative experiences for black men in prison and the role of the arts in providing these.

‘It started off as a discussion around black history, black politics, revolutionary theories and then translated into them expressing and exploring themselves through creativity. So for the first time, black men felt a sense of freedom, felt their experiences were being validated... for guys who couldn’t read or write, poetry and performance became a vehicle for them to explore who they were.’

The next milestone in Martin’s work with black prisoners came when the late Anne Peaker suggested that Martin use the Unit (now the Anne Peaker Centre) to articulate the voice of black offenders. With a group of artists, he developed and delivered a project called Nuff Respect, which looked at the creative and rehabilitative needs of black prisoners.<sup>vi</sup>

Over the following years Martin regularly delivered projects specifically for black male offenders through the Anne Peaker Centre and the National Black Prisoners Support Project. His workshop approach would involve group bonding, the participatory definition of a brief, providing an inventory of creative workshops, teaching from a point of prior knowledge (so that poetry can begin with hip hop and grime) and teaching by example. Driven by the possibilities of engagement and transformation, Martin adapted his approach in each situation to maximise these possibilities. ‘I didn’t have a methodology,’ says Martin, ‘I just knew that I was engaging black men and whatever I was doing was working. There was no evaluation then, no real academic context to what I was doing, I just knew it worked.’

In terms of the spectrum described in the introduction to this report, Martin’s approach is difficult to categorise. His methods spread broadly across the range from arts to therapy, while their application is immediate and context specific. Although it may not be useful to try to describe Martin’s methodology, his work is underpinned by structures and templates of understanding that are familiar to the men with whom he works.

Martin describes an ideal structure as ‘culturally competent, embracing cultural forms of creativity... validating those cultural forms as a viable form of expression’. In co-facilitators, he looks for those who are culturally competent in their own spheres. In order to create a safe space in which transformation can occur, they need to be able to build credibility through shared humour and their real, lived, common experiences.

As Chris Johnston has pointed out, structure is not value free. Although Martin’s structures are based on shared societal and cultural values, they reflect his personal values too. He favours using traditional wisdom, for example, as a basis for interpretation of reality. The Sankofa bird, after which his company is named, is an African bird with its head facing backwards. It symbolises going back and retrieving, ‘So I go back and search for wisdom and bring that as the foundation for interpreting social reality’.

Martin sees the creative process as part of a wider developmental process concerned with rites of passage. He has developed a range of projects around fatherhood, masculinity and rites of passage using black history and performance as the tool. He uses African-centred performance, not in its purest sense but rather in terms of favouring the non-linear tradition, the aural tradition and ritualised performance. He uses traditional wisdom as a basis for the men to creatively interpret their reality, together with a strategy he calls POSE - looking at Purpose, how you take Ownership of that, Sustainability and Evaluation.

‘So with the prisoners, we’d looked at what was their purpose in life, they’re prisoners, but prisoner, offender, is a social label... Black self-concept is a very important tool... So we use the creative process to engage them in a process of self-definition, outside of their social label.’

As a part of doing this, Martin uses a ritual that involves sitting in a circle with a stone in the centre. Each person picks the stone up in the morning and affirms something they would like to get from that day. Every evening, they repeat the process, stating what it was that they received. The stone is said to contain memory, and so they may dedicate thoughts or actions through the stone to people who are not there. They may go into the centre of the circle and pray. The ritual is about finding what works the best for them, about establishing meaning and purpose in their days and lives.

In conclusion, Martin’s work interweaves the personal and political concerns specific to black men. His structure is informed by his understanding of criminology, psychology and poetry, and fundamentally underpinned by cultural competency.

‘If you’re going to engage [black offenders] as a theatre provider,’ Martin reiterates, ‘you have to engage on those cultural norms that they relate to. If you can get the hard to reach and access to connect to their own peers, to build capacity within their own peers, they already have the cultural competency. If you can connect that to public and social policy concerns... you have a model practice.’

Martin feels that this connection is important and overlooked. He points out that the black male prison population is increasing, the level of gang affiliation is increasing and the length of sentences is increasing. Martin questions how these high-risk prisoners can be brought back into the community, asking, ‘What do prisons do for

black prisoners? They could say ‘we provide the same service to them as to everybody else’, while in education, the curriculum is monocultural and Eurocentric.... A black man inside does not have the same lived reality as a white man, even on a class basis, so the ideology and framing is flawed.... The Prison Service is not culturally competent because it does not reflect the people inside.’

In terms of theatre companies going in to prisons, Martin feels that the involvement of two or three black men in a company is not enough to address racism. Rather than operating from a policy of inclusion, companies need to be culturally competent, peer-led and empowering. Martin would like to see ‘a clear evaluation strategy in relation to the regime, more encouragement for non-white practitioners to make a difference in prisoners’ lives... I would like to see a greater acknowledgement within the networks of prison theatre that there are other ways of being and seeing and experiencing social reality through the creative process. Would I like to have an all black theatre company that deals with health and prisons and stuff? Yes.’

Martin Glynn has worked with education and arts establishments in North America, the Caribbean, Europe and extensively in the UK, developing literature initiatives, producing and directing performances and setting up residencies. As an arts development consultant, he has worked alongside many arts agencies and assisted in the formulation and implementation of policy initiatives. As a workshop facilitator, he has a strong reputation for delivering his work in areas such as social and youth work, prisons, special needs, training, libraries and education. As a writer, he has gained a national and international reputation for his commissioned work in theatre, radio drama, live performance and poetry. In 1998, he set up CROP - Centre for Rights Of Passage research – which has recently been superseded by Sankofa Associates. His latest book, *Sankofa Returns: Storytelling as a Rite of Passage* will be published in March 2006.

## Escape Artists

‘Escape Artists fulfils its purpose at the meeting point of clients, contractors, artists and stakeholders – providing a service which achieves tangible educational and developmental results through professionally managed artistic activity.

The company doesn’t just see its workshops or productions as one-offs. It aims to ensure that the vital importance of people’s creativity in promoting health and social welfare can continue to be developed in sustainable forms. This it does through ‘the bridge’: the company’s model of long-term, arts-infused support for socially marginalized people.

On a more general level, the company’s whole reason for being is to provide access to the arts within some of the country’s most disadvantaged communities, such as those within Young Offenders Institutions, Secure Hospitals, Prisons, Mental Health Institutions, Hostels for Homeless, Hospices and elsewhere’

(Taken from Escape Artists’ website, [www.escapeartists.co.uk](http://www.escapeartists.co.uk)).

In the early nineties, a drama group comprising life prisoners at HMP Wayland realised that they needed a professional director. They wrote a letter to Matthew Taylor. Paul Malcolm, an ex-Wayland Group member, remembers, ‘It was agreed that I would, along with another prisoner, interview an outside professional to come and work with the group. I am still almost astonished by the fact that this actually happened – two life sentence prisoners interviewing somebody to come and work in the place!’

The interview turned out to be the start of an association that was to lead to the formal establishment of Escape Artists in 1996. Initially, the company worked with serving and ex-prisoners employing the arts as a tool for personal development and rehabilitation, although over the years its role has expanded to include arts programmes with homeless people, young people at risk and people with mental illnesses.

In part, Escape Artists’ expansion is related to ‘the bridge’, a clearly conceived model of social inclusion through the arts. Although more time and resources are needed to put all of the elements of ‘the bridge’ into place, this model underpins every aspect of the company’s work.

Ultimately ‘the bridge’ is the concept behind what Matthew describes as ‘the long-term arts infused support that is at the core of Escape Artists’ practice’. It stretches from marginalised client groups to the mainstream cultural industry. It enables clients, such as prisoners and homeless people, who have the talent and determination, to move to a position of being employable within this industry, whether as an actor, stage technician, administrator, workshop facilitator, mentor or journalist.

The ‘bridge’ model supports clients along their journey through mentoring and training. It also takes into account that it is neither possible nor desirable that everybody makes a linear crossing: there are other ways of interacting with the bridge. The ‘bridge’ is there to provide assistance and alternatives to clients wishing to climb

off or onto it at any point. It is there for clients to return to - and if they fall off, there is no limit to how many times they can try again. The ethos of 'the bridge' is summarised in a sign that hangs above Matthew's office door, 'Ever tried, ever failed, no matter. Try again, fail again, fail better.' (The words are those of Samuel Beckett).

Within the 'bridge' model, Escape Artists' methodologies could be broadly classified as arts-based and education-based. On the arts-based side of the spectrum, the company presents high-quality and challenging artistic productions. These focus on issues of social inclusion and are concerned with opening access to such work across all sections of the community.

*The Bach and Mozart Project*, a play by Adriano Vianello, is one such production and is illustrative of how 'the bridge' can work. The play is 'an emotionally powerful and intellectually vibrant piece of theatre' with a cast of two professional actors, one of whom is also an ex-prisoner. At the inspirational end of 'the bridge', *The Bach and Mozart Project* will tour theatres all over the UK. Simultaneously, it will tour prisons combining the same professional production with workshops for prisoners.

It is quite likely that these workshops will introduce some prisoners to the arts for the first time. This is where their journey across the bridge begins. When they leave prison, they can contact Escape Artists and become involved in the company's community work, through Escape Club, for example, a drama group which is open to all. In addition, should ex-offenders be interested in pursuing a career in the arts, there should be mentoring and training available to them. Furthermore, Escape Artists can provide them with work placements and the possibility of future professional work – many company members have become employed in this way.<sup>vii</sup>

On the education-based side, Escape Artists is involved in developing innovative education projects which help to engage, empower and inspire clients. The company is an Open College Network approved training centre and most of the courses offered can be accredited. (Non-accredited courses can provide a cheaper option to institutions).

Escape Artists' facilitators include ex-offenders who have become successful educators and practitioners. In line with the objectives of 'the bridge', this promotes an exchange between the perspectives and experiences of people living in the margins with those involved in the mainstream. It helps to create some common ground between the prisoners and the facilitators, while at the same time providing a real and inspirational example to the prisoners of how a life can be changed.

Escape Artists' education programmes are modelled around the needs of the client group in terms of timescale, accreditation, issues addressed, incorporation of enrichment materials and art forms used. Most of the programmes are drama-based, although the company's pool of practitioners is skilled in and able to incorporate other mediums - such as music, dance and video - depending on the interests of the participants.

The teaching methods employed by Escape Artists' practitioners are flexible and dynamic. The facilitators 'encourage direct participation from the learners through practical exercises and hands on experience. Traditional classroom tutorials are kept

to a minimum as most teaching takes place through informal group activity.’  
(<http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/images/pdfs/FINAL%20CJS%20MT.PDF>)

An example of an Escape Artists education programme is New Directions, a National Open College Network accredited course in pre-employment training. In 2005, it was delivered to four Young Offender Institutions by facilitators who used drama (performance and participatory), video and movement. The young people ‘were immediately engaged and given the encouragement and support they needed to maintain focus throughout the two-week programme, enabling them to achieve concrete results. Of the 85% of young people who were able to attend the course from start to finish, every one achieved the NOCN accreditation’.  
(<http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/images/pdfs/FINAL%20CJS%20MT.PDF>)

Although Escape Artists is sensitive to the contexts within which it operates, the company’s meta-model of practice is one that assumes that access to the arts is what really matters.

‘We believe that access to the arts is an end in itself,’ explained Matthew, ‘that we have a responsibility to ensure that access to the arts is made available to all, that lack of access to the arts is an indicator of cultural poverty – and not just amongst those who don’t benefit from that access, but also in those who are in a position to support the development of the arts at the social margins, but fail to do so’.

Escape Artists consists of Matthew Taylor – Director; Christine Cellier – Education Manager; Anita Lehman – Education Officer; Paul Malcolm – Training Manager; Megan Bunting – Training Officer; Simon Gunton – Musical Director; Alexander Leiffheidt – Development Director; Francesca Elia – Office Manager in Rome; Jeremy Hardingham – Production Manager; Polly Griffiths – Marketing Manager; Jen McCloud – Administrator. The company also works with a pool of freelance facilitators.

***Original member of Escape Artists and ex-prisoner, Paul Malcolm, describes the process of theatre in prison as he experienced it in the early 1990s***

I believe that the Wayland Group – in terms of British prison theatre – was unique, firstly because it originated in the mind of a prisoner. It just so happened that I had the desire and drive to create something better than what was offered by the under resourced drama class which exuded a stifling lack of vision, ambition and inclination to strive for ‘something better’.

In the course of a year, I wrote, directed, acted, organised, negotiated with the authorities and tried to ‘sell’ prison theatre to anyone who would listen. My goal was to form a group which would produce work as professionally as possible within the prevailing conditions. I could not have achieved this goal, however, without support and collaboration from other prisoners and some members of prison staff.

This process culminated in a performance of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* by Dario Fo. A production which was featured in a respected national newspaper and attended – for the first time at Wayland – by an audience of ‘notables’ drawn from the local community outside and further afield. For me though this was not the culmination of the work it was a beginning.

However, I had no theatre background. In fact I’d only been to the theatre 3 times in my life. I recognised that in order to progress, theatre in Wayland needed professional directorial input.

During that first year though I had learned valuable lessons in relation to the tactics and strategy necessary for developing and sustaining a successful theatre group within the prison environment. I was fortunate to have the support of a strong Head of Education who had ‘the Governor’s ear’. Although some prison staff were supportive of the group other elements were hostile. The aforementioned support and line of communication was invaluable in ‘playing prison politics’ to ensure that the group had a reasonably sound foundation on which to develop.

I also recognised the importance of publicising the group’s work to all departments within the prison, for example, probation, administration, uniformed staff, and involving them as much as possible – even if this was limited to discussing what was happening. This was done both from a genuine desire to break down barriers and to ‘show’ them how positive prison theatre could be. I also wanted to ensure that the work of the group had as high a profile as possible across the prison. This was done in order to render it difficult for anyone to stop the group’s work without a number of questions being asked.

It also became clear to me that there was a necessity to ‘vet’ prisoners wishing to join the group. This was done to ensure optimum levels of potential, ability and talent. It also ensured that the group remained at a manageable size. In addition it helped reduce the possibility of negative or destructive individuals joining the group. Every prisoner wishing to become involved in the group was referred to me or another member of the group and a collective decision would be taken as to whether they should be involved. As far as I am aware this was unheard of (and still is) in prison theatre in Britain.

Although 'drama' was offered as an option in the Education timetable I ensured that once cast and crew were in place and rehearsals under way the group became 'closed' in order to minimise disruption.

This whole process in heightened control for prisoners in defining the nature of 'their' theatre group is probably best exemplified by the following: as I have mentioned, in the wake of Accidental Death... I recognised the need for a professional director. As a result it was agreed that I would, along with another prisoner, interview an outside professional to come and work with the group. I am still almost astonished by the fact that this actually happened – two life sentence prisoners interviewing somebody to come and work in the place! I don't believe there was a precedent and unfortunately I have difficulty envisaging the likes of it happening again.

Although there were limitations in the work we could tackle, for example, the need for predominately male casts, running time all the choices made were as a result of democratic collaboration between prisoners and director. At no time did we submit our production choices to the regime for 'approval'. Of course at times democracy can be 'difficult' especially when ego and questions of personal taste are involved. Difficulties were rare though and the group had the benefit of an assured directorial hand.

Another aspect which I think renders the Wayland group unique was its longevity and creative output. The group existed for four years and in that period delivered eight productions. I have a slightly Camusian approach to the reasons for this: a random collision of chance – in that the 'core' of the group comprised five long term prisoners who also happened to be talented performers and/or technicians and a dedicated director. This happy convergence helped establish an ethos and discipline which was quickly adopted by subsequent members of the group. In addition I was fortunate to begin the journey when a supportive Education Head was in place – she left after the group's third production – who backed my vision. Remove one or two elements from the equation and it could have been very different.

I believe however that the mainstay of the group was its desire to produce theatre of a high calibre. In the programme for the second production, the first directed by Matthew Taylor, he wrote that audience members might initially be attracted by the novelty of entering a prison but expressed the hope that, based upon the quality of the production, they would return long after the novelty had worn off. The fact that this was achieved is demonstrated by a retention and increase of audience size over each subsequent production. From a run of two nights for Accidental Death... productions eventually ran for five nights with occasional matinee performances.

Eventually the group began to disintegrate as core members were released or transferred to other prisons. The consequent weakening of the group encouraged elements within the prison – who had always been hostile – to move against it. In addition, changes were taking place within prison education. Scope to produce theatre for theatre's sake became severely restricted. This was a result of both budgetary constraints and the drive to make all Educational activities accredited, taught courses – theatre directors are not teachers. The group, indeed 'home grown' drama at Wayland ceased to exist in 1994 – it has not returned.

## **Acknowledgements**

The writing and research of this report was carried out by Kiare Ladner on behalf of Escape Artists. Although there were many people who generously gave of their time, provided information and offered more, she would like to thank in particular those who are listed alphabetically below. Without their input, the report would not exist. Without their contributions to the arts, we would live in a much poorer society.

Christine Cellier; Lavinia Costantino; Martin Glynn; Sandra Hall; Anna Herrmann; Saul Hewish; Jenny Hughes; Chris Johnston; Alison Jones; Sharon Kennet; Paul Malcolm; Caoimhe McAvinchey; Andrew Miles; Antonia Rubinstein; Simon Ruding; Matthew Taylor; Richmond Trew; Andy Watson and Kat Wild.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The researcher is aware that the companies featured in this report are based in England, though most of them have worked throughout the UK.

<sup>ii</sup> **Black offenders are likely to be given longer sentences**

The UK has the highest prison population in Western Europe with 76,070 people incarcerated at this point (and rising). Currently Ethnic minorities make up 24 percent of this population.

16 percent of the country's inmates are black men, whereas 3 percent are Asian and 5 percent are classified as 'other'.

31 percent of the female prison population is also black; although this number includes women from foreign black communities.

Research from the Prison Reform Trust has brought attention to the mistreatment of black males in the justice system.

It said that in five pilot system police areas, magistrate court decisions indicated that black and Asian defendants were less likely to be found not guilty than white defendants.

The research also suggests that black offenders are likely to be given longer sentences than either white or Asian prisoners.

Frances Crook, Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform supports the use of tough community orders said:

“Black people are disproportionately sucked into the criminal justice system and they appear in the prison system disproportionately, so anything that helps to keep young Black men out of prison is a good thing”.

(Taken from Black Britain, <http://www.blackbritain.co.uk/news/> retrieved on 6 March 2006).

<sup>iii</sup> The word culture implies the integrated patterns of human behaviour that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. The word competence implies having the capacity to function in a particular way: the capacity to function within the context of culturally integrated patterns of human behaviour defined by a group. Cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross et al., 1989; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991). Operationally defined, cultural competence is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate

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cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes (Davis, 1997 referring to health outcomes).

[<http://www.be4researchproject.org.uk/spotlightmarch2003.html>; Spotlight Articles, News & links- March 2003; Issue of the Month - Cultural Competency; accessed 28 January 2006]

<sup>iv</sup> The word culture implies the integrated patterns of human behaviour that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. The word competence implies having the capacity to function in a particular way: the capacity to function within the context of culturally integrated patterns of human behaviour defined by a group. Cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross et al., 1989; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991). Operationally defined, cultural competence is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes (Davis, 1997 referring to health outcomes).

[<http://www.be4researchproject.org.uk/spotlightmarch2003.html>; Spotlight Articles, News & links- March 2003; Issue of the Month - Cultural Competency; accessed 28 January 2006]

<sup>v</sup> ‘Many of the participants’ immediate response about the work was to talk about the ‘buzz’ of being involved in a performance project. In doing a public performance, there was the sense of a very real adrenalin rush and an experience of working through fear without using old coping mechanisms such as drugs or alcohol. In this way the performance provided a real space in which to test out some of the new strategies that had been discussed in small group therapy sessions.’

The ‘buzz’ - and its short, medium and long-term - impacts is difficult to evaluate. In an interview with Andrew Miles of REACTT, he suggested that it was not impossible: chemical levels in the blood could be measured, brain scans could be taken or more simply the work could be recorded on film and evaluated psychologically. It is questionable, however, whether such measures are pragmatic, necessary or desirable.

<sup>vi</sup> A new version of the Nuff Respect will be available through the Anne Peaker Centre from May 2006 called *Scoping Review: The Arts with Black and Ethnic Minority Offenders*.

<sup>vii</sup> Adorius, a Cambridge Cantata, is Escape Artists’ most ambitious arts-based project to date. It was conceived by Matthew and composer/musician Simon Gunton in the summer of 2003, after the company was approached in hope of rectifying the lack of music provision for mental health service users in Cambridgeshire.

Adorius is characteristic of a Bridge Model production in that it began in workshops at Fulbourn Hospital, various local day centres and Sue Ryder Care in Ely. Through

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Simon's inspirational guidance, it developed into a cross-genre composition. Finally it involved many of the original, marginalised participants in a performance with the prestigious Kings College Choir at Kings College Chapel in Cambridge.

The performance received rave responses and is continuing to evolve – on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, it will be re-staged at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. 'To be welcomed onto what some might regard as the ultimate stage of elitism is an enormous achievement and a typically ambitious way for the company to mark its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday.' ([http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/wwd\\_adoreus.htm](http://www.escapeartists.co.uk/wwd_adoreus.htm)).