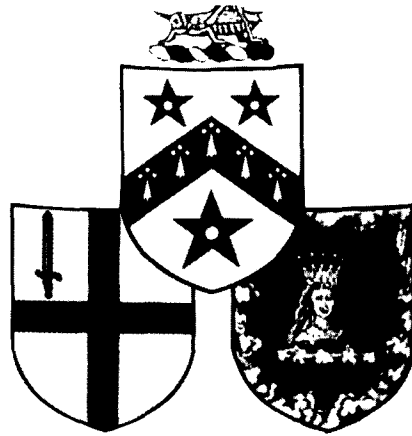


*G R E S H A M*  
*COLLEGE*



**WILL CROSS-CULTURAL  
THEATRE EVER WORK ON THE  
ENGLISH STAGE?**

A Lecture by

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**with PETER LICHTENFELS**

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# **Will Cross-Cultural Theatre ever work on the English Stage?**

**Professor Lynette Hunter, with Peter Lichtenfels**

I will approach the question of the survival of cross-cultural theatre in Britain in 3 ways: I would like to look first, at the welcome (or not) given to international theatre that visits the UK, particularly European theatre, second, at the place of theatre from a variety of cultural traditions flourishing in the UK as a result of immigration in the second half of this century, and third, at the export of British theatre to an international setting.

In the first lecture of this 1998-99 series I spoke of some of the changes to the funding of British Theatre in the 80s, and their impact on the distinctive waves of new plays and classic revivals from the 70s to the present day. But the changes in the funding situation did not change the fact that most theatres in Britain, before and after the 80s, are not company-based, in other words the actors and other production members come together for each individual production. There are no ensembles in Britain, and nearly all theatres work with very short rehearsal periods. The shift in funding simply exacerbated these factors by making the primary drive of theatre buildings commercial. And lest there be any doubt: the arts never have been, nor ever will be self-funding. Artistic experiment takes time, experience and conversation, for artists to develop and for audiences to learn to value, and often the appreciation is posthumous. The unique hybridity of commercialism and state support that shapes British theatre is fundamental to understanding the relationship between British and international theatre, and between English and non-English cultural traditions in the theatre.

To begin with the impact of visiting international theatre: the visit of Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble in 1955 to the Old Vic, had a profound effect on British writers, if not other parts of theatre production, and through the 50s and 60s the one consistent encouragement for a world season was at the Aldwych Theatre. From the 70s onward, though, the international theatre presence in the UK has been confined to sporadic one-offs, the occasional 'international season', with some significant exceptions. The Edinburgh Festival, for example, has an enviable record of welcoming some of the major European companies into its short 3-week season. The Riverside Theatre in Hammersmith during the late 70s and early 80s, under the inspiration of David Gothard, became a mecca for international theatre, as did the Leicester Haymarket under Peter Lichtenfels in the late 1980s. For the past 6 years there has been the biennial London International Festival of Theatre, or LIFT, and the intermittent international festivals at the Barbican such as the current BITE programme.

On the whole, Britain has not encouraged international theatre, and has certainly not supported co-operation between British companies and those from elsewhere, and, in my opinion, British theatre is losing out.

## **WHY IS THERE LESS INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THEATRE TODAY THAN 10 YEARS AGO?**

However, the lack of co-operation is not surprising. To focus on European and English theatre for example: the fundamental difference is again that hybridity of the commercial and the subsidised, for most European theatre is fully subsidised. This difference leads to differences in organisation, training and production patterns that make it difficult for practical co-operative work, but more importantly, establish a radical difference in the public's expectation of what the theatre should be doing, why we should go to it. Subsidised theatre in Europe has its own pros and cons. In Spain and Italy the theatres are sharply politicised along the political lines of the subsidisers. A play that wants to tour to Italy has to be careful not to perform in a clearly right wing city before trying to move on to a left-wing town, it can only go to one of them. At the Instituto del Teatro and Resad, both national training centres for theatre in Spain, there is clearly felt tension between those staff members hired under Franco and those hired after his death. Another example from Spain is that of Lluís Pasqual, who was appointed Artistic Advisor to the National Theatre in Madrid as one of a three person team, in the dying months of Gonzalez's socialist government. All of them, along with the Artistic Director, were promptly fired when

the present conservatives were elected. An actor, designer or director in a European country may well feel more like a civil servant than a self-employed, often temporarily employed, artist. In Germany the town gives the theatre a budget, the theatre does its job by putting on the season of plays, and the town gets the box office takings. In France, major finance is often based around an individual such as Peter Brook or Ariane Mnouchkine, in a way unheard of in the UK, and only faintly similar to Howard Barker's production company. Finance is in the end the real difference. For example, the cities of Munich and Hamburg each give more to their civic arts programmes than the Arts Council gives to the whole of theatre in Britain.

The result of higher and more consistent subsidy is that the European rehearsal times are often 3 months or longer, not the 3 weeks of the typical British rehearsal; there are many ensemble groups with the opportunity to develop new theatre techniques and structures, and none in the UK; a production may play in the city of its company and then elsewhere for a year or more, in contrast to the normal 3 to 4 week run for a production in this country: three pragmatic reasons why co-operative productions between Britain and Europe are difficult to achieve.

WHY DOESN'T BRITAIN SUPPORT ITS ARTS IN THE WAY THEY ARE SUPPORTED ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE?

CAN YOU REALLY DO AS MUCH IN 3 WEEKS AS IN 3 MONTHS?

IS THE WRITTEN TEXT SO CENTRAL TO DRAMA THAT STAGECRAFT AND DESIGN TAKE A SECOND PLACE?

Furthermore, European audiences and actors are trained in different ways. Actors on the continent frequently train for up to 6 years, without which training ensemble work is not possible. They then move to consistent work in subsidised theatre, producing a play over a 6 month to 2 year period. Actors in the UK train for only 3 years at most, at places like RADA or LAMBDA, where the yearly costs are in excess of £7000. The only university course for acting in the country is at Manchester Metropolitan University, where up to 1500 students apply for 24 places. Despite the scholarships offered by generous ex-trainees at RADA, like Sir Anthony Hopkins, Manchester effectively becomes the only place offering any subsidised theatre training for students whose families cannot afford fees. People such as Peter Brook who had to leave this country to find support, could not have survived without an independent income. Nor could a number of others.

Of course these days, in stark contrast with the pre WW2 period of repertory companies in nearly every town and city that fell by the wayside in the face of film, television and video, many actors arrive in the profession with no training at all – often from the Oxbridge connection which has in a sense filled the gap with intelligent and usually relatively well-off graduates. One example might be the group of young people from Cambridge who ended up at the Traverse in 1983-5: after Jenny Killick had gone to the Traverse as a trainee director, she was followed in good old-school-network style by Paul Unwin, Simon Russell Beale and Tilda Swinton. All of whom, as others such as Rowan Atkinson, have produced some exceptional work and have gone on to successful careers. In the public's mind in the UK, and fostered by the Oxford and Cambridge situation, there is still a sense of a direct connection between the amateur and the professional stage, which has its own pros and cons. But the general lack of training may be indicative of larger problem that many other actors have, of limited range, especially when faced with theatre from other cultures and places. I would also suggest, that the middle class dominance in the theatre must have an effect on the range of class issues addressed, the kind of material produced, whose life it speaks about and to, which audience it develops.

IS BRITISH THEATRE WHITE, MIDDLE/UPPER CLASS AND SAFE?

Audiences need training too. One of the striking statistics of the Edinburgh Festival is that the majority of the audience to the main events is from the city itself and nearby environs. This audience has been exposed to so many foreign language productions that they expect and easily deal with the overhead translation boards which dispose of the language barrier that is the most obvious hindrance to international cultural exchange. More subtle and more important, audiences have to learn how to understand different stage techniques, different production structures, particularly the intensely visual and physical theatre of contemporary European traditions. As I discussed in the previous lecture, at the

same time as European cities were increasing their theatre provision for children and young people, Britain was winding down its Theatre in Education programme. Nothing about drama is 'hardwired' into our nervous system, we have to experience and learn a vocabulary for cultural difference whether it is social, ethnic, or religious, before we can respond to it enough to value it.

#### IS IT TRUE THAT AUDIENCES RESENT HAVING NEW EXPERIENCES?

All this said, the best of European theatre is often better than British theatre for clear reasons, but bad directors, hired alongside actors with longterm job security, are a recipe for disaster. The best may be better, but the bad is worse. Furthermore, the very lack of training in acting does, in some cases, give British actors an edge, it makes them willing to try anything. Certainly, good British actors are much beloved by European directors, whom seem to want the ensemble conditions and longer rehearsal periods along with the nervous hunger of the actor as artist. A difficult balance.

#### **International theatre traditions resident in Britain**

The 1976 report by Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, was the first considered report on the diversity of British culture and its funding. As an equally important 1989 report from the Arts Council, *Towards Cultural Diversity*, pointed out, the 1976 report put a wide variety of issues on the agenda, but also instituted the term 'Ethnic Minority Arts', which became a damaging category over the following years. Significantly the 1989 report also criticised the idea that Ethnic Minority Arts were 'community based' and 'an appendix' to national culture. In its turn, the 1989 report attempted to address the western/eurocentric national consciousness that relegated 'Ethnic Minority Arts' to the periphery, noting in particular the lack of permanent buildings for say, Black arts.

Of the 30 new theatres created since the war, not one belongs to a black company, neither do any of the ten new art and photography galleries which the Arts Council has helped to create belong to a black organisation.(3)

In addition it points out the lack of 'black qualified personnel at the top end of administration' ; and the uneven funding base. The report then goes on to list the achievements of the late 80s, in redressing some of these problems, while acknowledging that many are still there.

The central focus for the 1989 report was to devise arts policy that would dismantle the notion that culturally diverse traditions are 'Ethnic Minority' based, and only an appendix to 'national' culture. Yet there is a curious division in the resulting projects, with groups that attempt crosscultural work such as Tara Arts, or the National Theatre Studio initiative on African/Black Theatre, being put forward as central examples of success, at the same time as the marketing and research projects are still firmly based in communities – supposedly one of the areas that was under criticism. In fact, I would suggest that it is impossible to get away from communities, especially where theatre is concerned. Theatre is a clearly social event that is generated by groups of people and performed for groups of people. The energy that makes it possible for the actors, writers and directors to produce a play has to come from some common ground no matter how diverse they are as individuals, and that common ground will define them as a community. Just so, members of an audience, unless it is simply absorbing something it already knows, have to find the energy to involve themselves and learn from the experience. Their commitment to this participation has to be a result of social issues, including the aesthetic and the political, that have had an impact on them. It is impossible to divorce oneself from community of some kind.

Although the report may have been a reponse to the Arts Council reluctance to support 'community arts' more generally, it was also underwriting a line of aesthetic snobbery that suggests that community-rooted arts are ill-thought-out, poorly rendered, 'amateurish', in order to protect culturally diverse arts from the criticism of being unskilled or without craft, even less 'civilised'. However, all theatre has to be rooted in community. And theatre, like other arts, provides clear indication of whether or not that community is exploring its potential or simply fulfilling its own cliches. A subsequent report, *Going Black Under the Skin*, from the London Arts Board (1995), gives a unique insight into that necessity. Doubtless spurred on by the vast underfunding of writing, as compared to the other arts, from immigrant communities, the report speaks plainly of the discrimination against Black writers, from the difficulty of finding an agent, to the cultural perception of language experiment, and dramatic

technique and structure in Black writing, which may be put down to 'naivete' rather than a different vision.

What the report makes quite clear is that there are definite community links for the writers, immediate issues that they are addressing. By implication, people who do not understand those issues, or perhaps do not even see them as issues, are not part of the community, nor do they accept that this community is part of their lives.

#### CAN THEATRES BE BASED IN NATIONS?

#### DO THEATRES NEED COMMUNITIES?

Writers from the different societies that have emigrated to Britain have however had some success. People such as Hanif Kureishi from Pakistani background, Marcella Evaristi of Italian descent, Caryl Phillips from a Caribbean family, or Jyoti Patel from India via Uganda. Looking further back we could take the writing career of Mustafa Matura from Trinidad as an almost textbook example of how the theatre in Britain has responded to an incoming theatre presence:

As Time Goes By	Traverse Theatre	1971
Play Mas	Royal Court	1974
Rum an Coca Cola	Royal Court	1976
Another Tuesday	Black Theatre Cooperative	1978
More, More	Black Theatre Cooperative	1978
Independence	Bush Theatre	1979
Welcome Home Jacko	The Factory/Riverside	1979
A Dying Business	Riverside	1980
One Rule	Riverside	1981
Meetings	Hampstead	1982
Party at the Palace	Channel 4	1983
There's Something Wrong in Paradise	Granada Television	1984
Trinidad Sisters	Tricycle	1988
The Coup	Royal National Theatre	1991

Matura starts out with the theatres dedicated to new writing, not surprisingly The Traverse, the rather less well-recognised (for no good reason) theatre in Scotland, and only then the Royal Court. After a few years with a touring company he founds along with one other person, The Black Theatre Cooperative, he moves to smaller theatres in London like the Bush, and is taken up into Riverside during its international years. His work then makes the transition to television, while the stage plays from the late 80s go into the Tricycle, dedicated to the development of Black and Irish theatre, and to the National, the pinnacle of theatre canonicity (but at the Cottesloe).

The history is caught up into a major decision by the Arts Council in the late 80s, which was to put 4% of its budget into new communities so that they could develop their own voice. Results can be seen not only in the Tricycle, but also Stratford East with its policy on developing Asian theatre, or in Tara Arts or Talawa. Certainly this policy decision has integrated actors who might otherwise have been excluded from the stage and has help constitute the 'rainbow' casts that are often now found on the main stages of London, Birmingham and Manchester. The theatre in the UK is arguably more integrated and less racist than many European countries.

What is significant though are the companies that have disappeared like Temba, L'Overture, or Carib. Since 1984 the number of theatre companies across the board in the UK has declined, but because of the smaller base of the Black Arts sector, the loss has been proportionally higher. This is partly because the impetus for growth in this sector has not necessarily focused on building-based theatre, which as I outlined in the previous lecture, lies at the heart of current arts policy. Those companies that have survived have a record of distinctly cross-cultural work which reflects the cross-cultural lives of their members. For example, the Talawa theatre company's mission statement reflects a self-conscious positioning of black theatre in Britain:

- to use black culture and experience to further enrich British theatre

- to provide high quality productions that reflect the significant creative role that black theatre plays within the national and international arena
- to enlarge theatre audiences from the black community

If the initial productions worked from Caribbean tradition, it did not take long for Talawa to add productions of work by Wilde and Shakespeare.

Tara Arts has a similar history, one that is informed by Jatinder Verma's characterisation of its first production in 1976/7 as one that 'linked Race to Communalism, as being part of the same spectrum of Oppression, ...to be opposed to the one is, necessarily to be opposed to the other....without the one, the sensibility that is Black slides into xenophobia; and without the other, we are unable to locate our own inadequacies within a larger context' (1989, 772). Tara Arts has a long-running history of productions of European classics, which it has reinterpreted in a startling variety of ways, including the employment of Indian film actor to play in *Cyrano* at the National Theatre. The actor came, notes Jatinder Verma in a recent interview, from a tradition 'which had a particular attitude to England as the repository of the greatness of theatre' to work with people who were part of English theatre and had continued to change it (1997, 361). In the same interview it was pointed out that Tara Arts, unlike Talawa, had not operated as a forum for new writing until the 90s. Verma responded,

the obvious analogy would be, 'How can you contribute to others when you're not sure of yourself?' By now we are sure the kind of territory we inhabit, the kind of things that we want to do, the ways in which we want to do them. Therefore there's a clarity for new writers. (1997, 364)

Yet despite all the difficulties, some would say that Talawa and Tara Arts for example, have bedded down, have become the token alternative cultural theatre for a particular ethnic group that makes it difficult for new communities to argue the value of their own voices. At the same time there are the highly successful actors like Josette Bushell-Mingo, of Caribbean origin, who worked with Talawa and is now working at the Royal Shakespeare Company. She says that although she is vitally interested in, say, dialect, and how it functions as a performance device, does not think of herself as a Caribbean actor. Profoundly cross-cultural, she brings the traditions she knows together in generative ways. And several communities have not yet, nor perhaps will ever want to, integrate their cultural traditions with those here in Britain.

But, this is all to tell a story from the position of the positive effects of the cultural tradition that has found itself resident in this country. If we look at the mainstream theatre it's a different story. Theatre traditions different to those in Britain have been extraordinarily difficult to set up, to keep going, and again, the bottom line is that there is such pressure on the box office that developing a voice is often too expensive and time-consuming. The West Yorkshire Playhouse has had two highly innovative seasons of Black theatre in the autumn of 1996 and 1997, yet this year, for various reasons, but especially in face of very low audience attendance, the season will not run. Is it reasonable to expect an audience to learn how to respond to different theatre techniques in just two short seasons? It may well be that in Leeds, with the lack of any small theatre companies to encourage people in the community to think in terms of acting and the theatre, there is simply no imagination for it – in contrast to dance, say, which in Leeds has a strong community base and is well-supported on the main stage. I also suspect that the sheer hugeness of London, and diversity of its cultural communities, may make it a special case in Britain.

#### HAVE WE NOW REACHED A TOKEN STATUS QUO ON FUNDING FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

The most recent Arts Council report, the *Cultural Diversity Action Plan*, is the basis of current policy. It begins in a typically late 90s manner, with the statements that

Ethnic minorities comprise 5.5% of the total population, nearly half of whom were born in the UK and 80% of which are below the age of 25. They spend, in all, £10 billion a year. (Marketing Business, 1997)

and

95% of new business start-ups involve ethnic minority entrepreneurs. (Barclays Bank report, 1997)

The new plan of action is summarised as the development of diversity through advocacy and access. What is interesting about this plan is the word 'advocacy'. Advocacy has come to be used in some circles of political theory as a 'good word', to distinguish 'representation', or a person who 'stands for' a group of others and expresses their wishes in his/her own words (like our parliamentary system), from 'advocacy', or a person who is asked by a group not to represent them but to advocate their cause. In other words the advocate must at all times recognise difference as well as similarity. Under 'Advocacy' the new report does not seem to be at all aware of this distinction, and offers no guidance whatsoever as to strategies for ensuring that the 'promotion', 'participation', 'approach', 'establish', 'stimulate', 'support', 'develop' and 'set up' that they promise to do on behalf of cultural diversity, will in fact be advocative rather than representative. One immediate aspect that sprang to my mind, as one who studies other diverse societies and cultures elsewhere in the world, is that the word 'black' is the focus for the diverse elements that need advocacy. This country like others will need to take on board the multiplicity of other cultures that are becoming more mobile, often enforcedly so, around the globe at the moment. How for example, are refugees classified? The Birmingham-based Asian storyteller, Vayu Naidu, shows an unusual awareness of this multiplicity in her collaborations, which led in 1997 to the Shape Shifting Stories season by Brumhalata in Birmingham. The season looked at the stories, music and movements from Indian, African and Irish traditions, as three of the primary migrations into the UK in recent years. Her work explicitly draws on traditional cultural styles, moving them firmly into the needs of a contemporary audience.

The Cultural Diversity Action Plan report is positive and encouraging, yet as it stands, strong on intentions rather than detail, so it is difficult to assess its potential impact. In contrast *The Landscape of Fact* report, a consultative Green Paper on 'Cultural Diversity for the English Funding System: African, Caribbean, Asian and Chinese Arts', provides rather more substance. It also attempts to think through the issues of audience, referring to Jenni Francis' *Attitudes Among Britain's Black Community Towards Attendance at Arts, Cultural and Entertainment Events* (1990), which drew on Rex Nettleford's analysis of the existence of three broad categories – ancestral/traditional, classical and contemporary. The terms allow the report to discuss the differences between theatre that provides a first generation migrant group with a sense of cultural continuity, and theatre that 'crosses art forms', and uses 'a number of frames of reference' to be 'part of an aesthetic that needs an informed response'.

#### IS ALL CULTURAL DIFFERENCE WHITE./BLACK?

Policy-making that recognises that similar divisions also occur within audiences as a whole throughout the UK, could radically change the face of mainstream theatre. What is troubling, is that both these recent reports underwrite the assessment of the mainstream British audience as markedly conservative. The recent response to Ian McKellan's decision to work in Leeds for the 1998-99 season, rather than London, is indicative. McKellan apparently finds the London audiences 'monochrome', as opposed to the 'diverse mix of ages, classes and backgrounds' that Michael Billington sees in regional theatres. Billington also cites Ken Campbell's description of the middle class, mailing list audience as 'brochure theatre'. Furthermore, despite welcoming the recent Arts Council initiative of 'New Audiences', he attributes this kind of brochure theatre to the 'whole system of expensive advance booking' which limits the audience for both culture and sport in Britain. In the face of a growing self-consciousness in international traditions of the way audiences can participate in theatre, in this country there is still resolute sticking to the idea of producer and consumer, with no interaction between the two, which, as I shall go on to talk about, typifies the commercial theatre that has come to dominate the theatre world, especially in London.

#### Exports of British theatre

One of the ways that British theatre is exported to the world is through the British Council. Since the Council is part of the Foreign Office there are political dimensions to this trade, for example, the strong policy of increasing Indo-Asian interchange. Yet the finances are not substantial and the programme is limited. Few productions, if any, move out from Britain to other places in the world in entirety unless they come from companies already geared to travel. The Royal Shakespeare Company, for example, might visit the United States in order to hold workshops, but rarely to put on a full production, although



it has recently just finished a season in New York and Washington. It is highly unusual for a British production initiated by a regional theatre company to tour internationally: part of this must be the difficulty of obtaining finance, but part must be attributed to a lack of interest from other parts of the world. The Leicester Haymarket production of the Russian director Lubymov's *Hamlet*, which toured in 1989/90 to Rome, Berlin, Amsterdam, Warsaw, Taiwan, Cracow and Japan, was a remarkable exception. However, from the 80s, transfers of the commercially successful productions of musicals have become more and more frequent.

A transitional production was Trevor Nunn and John Cairds' *Nicholas Nickleby* at the end of the 70s. Drawing on the way Joint Stock produced plays and Shared Experience developed narrative, they constructed a substantial and imaginative international hit. The musical straddles the older style of *My Fair Lady* and *Oliver*, and the new style of *Cats*, *Phantom at the Opera*, *Les Miserables* or *Starlight Express*. During the 80s both British and American producers began to start musicals off in London and then transfer them to the United States and further afield. The procedure was desirable partly because of the weak pound against the dollar at that time, but also because in London there is nothing resembling the all-powerful presence of a theatre critic who can kill a production with one bad review. London productions minimised the risk, and the sheer amount of transatlantic travel allowed for the building of demand by word of mouth. However, this style of production led to an extraordinary, and some would say ridiculous control over the product: it had to be replicated exactly in all its performance venues. So, for example, the first production of *Les Miserables* was by the Royal Shakespeare Company and directed by Trevor Nunn and John Caird. When the show went to New York, it was directed by the same directors, with exactly the same choreography, and in exactly the same style. Just so in Japan. As the show moved further afield, it could be directed by Trevor Nunn or John Caird, and eventually they would train directors to take over from them, and those new assistant directors would be replicating the London production – as far as possible. While the change has partly come about in response to the competition from film and television, which are replicable, in other ways the MacDonaldisation of theatre has resulted in a bizarre situation: one incident: an actress on *Ann of Green Gables* was given a video of her part in a previous show and told, 'That's your part...'. Recently, the success of the replication of musicals has led Disney into transferring *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*, from cartoon onto the stage.

This kind of replication, although it may be commercially successful because the product is so dependable, changes the nature of audiences. Until mid-century, if not until the 80s, theatregoing could be relatively cheap. With more expensive productions the tickets become more expensive, hence the paying audience wants to know that the production will be good, or at least, slick. The expense of the production also means that fewer things happen on stage, risks are not taken, and miracles do not happen. Audience expectation has come to demand consistency not only in production, but also in cultural representation. A large percentage of the audience for musicals comes from visiting tourists, arriving from all over the world. Rather like the large boards of theatre buildings, to satisfy such a diverse audience many productions focus on the clichés of globally recognisable culture. If musicals led the way for the shift, mainstage productions of contemporary classics or classic revivals, especially in London, have followed.

#### IS IT TRUE THAT AUDIENCES ONLY WANT TO BE SPOON-FED HIGH QUALITY FAMILIARITY?

An obvious victim of the shift is British comedy. England in particular has had a strong tradition for comic drama, from Oscar Wilde, through J.B. Priestley and Noel Coward, to Michael Frayn, Mike Stott or Tom Stoppard. Yet although there are several top-quality comedy festivals, which offer a showcase for burgeoning comic talent that is clearly all around us in the UK, most of that comedy, despite Alan Ayckbourn, remains stand-up, individual rather than company-based. There seems to be an insatiable need for stand-up comics on television, after all television pays much better, and so they don't often remain in the theatre, they develop specific personae and they have no need to write plays. There are of course people for whom this is the appropriate medium, but despite the examples of Rick Mayall or Ben Elton, there are many others who would once have made the transition yet have not done so. Central to this choice must be the very specificity of humour. Comedy needs location and place, it needs immediate issues and social relevance, it needs to challenge and take risks, none of which it can do in an effete global superficiality that offers only a reinforcement of stereotypes that we could look beyond.

## WILL WE FORGET HOW TO LAUGH AT OURSELVES?

The irony is that the musical has become a venture that is built rather like the subsidised theatre in Europe, to run for a long time until there is no more demand. While it may therefore pick up many of the drawbacks of that kind of construction, the commercial imperative wipes out virtually all artistic development, and this new form is left with the worst of both worlds. Not only that, it is left providing a template for other theatre which is completely divorced from the needs of the communities in which it plays: it operates rather like an unselfconscious postmodernism that has no social responsibility and likes to pretend that it is a free-floating cultural signifier. This has come about because the medium is not adequately valued, and therefore not adequately supported. However, the result is that it can produce nothing of any value to the individuals in this society, certainly nothing of the intensity of value that would lead people energetically to try to persuade politicians to change government policy toward the arts. Perhaps this is one reason that performance art is becoming so popular.

## WHERE IS THE THEATRE COMMUNITY IN THE UK IN 2000?

Britain's mainstream theatre pales into banality beside international theatre traditions either within this country or from elsewhere. It is brought to life only occasionally by miraculous acting. Perhaps, as Jatinder Verma suggests for Asian theatre, there must be a sense both of Communalism and Oppression: white British people are as involved in these issues as much as non-white. Without a sense of Oppression, or politically immediate issues which we tacitly if not actively endorse, we will lose the sense of what needs to be done, what changes are necessary. Without a sense of Communalism, we slide into the banal, conventional and self-reinforcing cocoon of national sentimentalism. England, at least, seems to have little sense of communalism. Perhaps because of the media dominance of the United States, perhaps because it has gone too late into Europe, perhaps because it's in a time of fundamental change that is so confusing that strong leaders who claim a moral imperative are welcomed with open arms, whether they be on right or left. And without communalism, a sense of oppression may just be too terrifying. Perhaps this is why some younger writers today fill their plays with mutilation: the classic response to disempowerment.

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