

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

Creation Theatre is Oxfordshire's largest producing theatre company, we pop up all over the city using unusual spaces to tell classic stories and we've been doing just that for nearly 20 years.

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We've just seen the curtain fall on our sell-out summer production of *Macbeth* in the gardens at Lady Margaret Hall; by and large we were lucky with the weather and 5,500 people came to see our take on Shakespeare's greatest villainous couple.

Everything wasn't quite so rosy two years ago though. Coming out of the wettest summer in 100 years in 2012 it seemed likely that Creation's board of trustees would have no option but to close the charity down. A soggy summer had dampened the appetite for Shakespeare in the great outdoors and coupled with reduced tourism to Oxford because of the Olympics we were facing a fight for survival. Aladdin and the Magical Lamp was definitely going ahead that Christmas and we took up the challenge to raise the £50,000 needed to plug the hole before that show was over. We raffled a holiday, wrote letters, stood on the stage at the end of each performance and generally made as much noise as possible to give Oxford the chance to keep live theatre being produced here.

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The existence of *Macbeth* serves as something of a spoiler, but we made it! The largest single donation we received was £1,000 and through raffle tickets and coins and notes in a bucket our audience secured the future of the charity.

So, as 2013 dawned, what should Creation become? We knew we didn't want to be in the position of asking the public for donations again,

any shows had to be 'low-risk', but we also had a duty to keep doing what people had donated to us for: producing exciting, accessible theatre in Oxford. What followed was a very strong year artistically and financially with a one-man *Jekyll & Hyde* at Blackwell's Bookshop, *Henry V* in promenade at Oxford Castle and a newly commissioned adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* for Christmas.

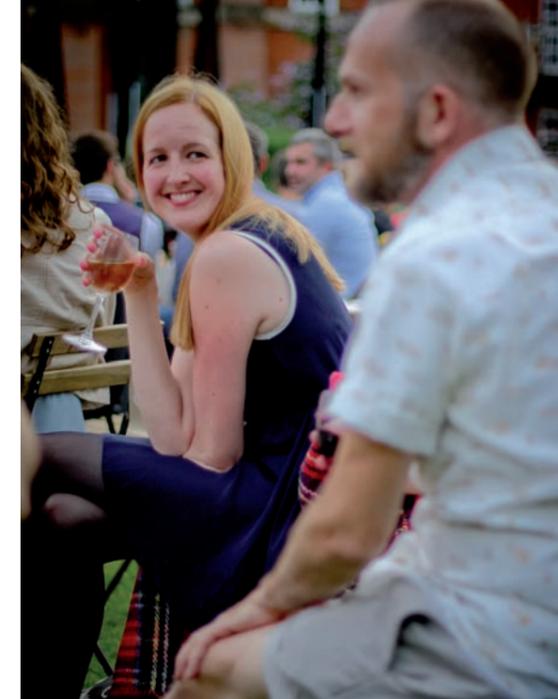
We made a few changes; having been donated office space by GBS Architects we gave away a lot of old costumes, props and technical bits we'd been holding on to, we invited two longstanding members of our creative teams to become Associate Artists and we upgraded our Box Office system to improve the online booking experience. The leaner, meaner Creation then set forth into 2014 with a year-long sponsorship model, having been approached by Pennington's Manches. The financial stability that has offered us has been instrumental in our planning for this year, and it's great to feel there's a much bigger team standing side by side with our little one.

We began planning an ambitious re-telling of *Macbeth* with a new Director for us, Jonathan Holloway. Jonathan came highly recommended and with the perfect pedigree – he'd established and run Red Shift Theatre, adapted classic texts for BBC Radio 4 and toured to unusual places all over the world. When we took Jonathan on his first tour of Lady Margaret Hall it suggested to everyone a post World War I setting. The red brick façade and manicured lawns conjured up a sanatorium for shell shocked officers where *Macbeth's* political machinations would take on new meaning.

With tables set on the lawn, sinister candelabras and cracked crockery we waited to welcome our first audiences into the murky world of the *Macbeths* and the response has been fantastic. Lady Margaret Hall gave us incredible freedom to drop banners from the top of the buildings, summon apparitions on the rooftop and peer in on medical examinations through open windows.



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Painting on such a large canvas has been a joy for our team and has produced a unique spectacle for our packed audiences – we are very sad to see it go. But go it must, as with all our shows, once they're gone they're gone and another is hot on the heels.

In this case it's *The Wind in the Willows*, although before that we'll be kicking off another term of our weekly Drama Clubs. Nearly 200 children every week get to grips with classic texts with our professional actors and workshop leaders, and some of the strongest support we received in the tough times has come from our Drama Clubbers and their parents. We do everything we can to connect our professional shows with the young people we work with – the *Macbeth* family performance was packed to the rafters – and we know we never have to dumb down Shakespeare for Oxford's kids!

So, to Christmas. Plans are afoot for messing about on the river in a new adaptation of the classic children's tale by Kenneth Grahame, who happens to be an old boy of St Edward's School where we'll be staging the show at The North Wall Arts Centre. Audiences can expect songs, silly jokes and a fair few cute ducklings played by our kids' chorus with lashings of Christmas cheer, and of course our famous crêpes served before the show.

As the seasons turn on the riverbank so the years turn for Creation in Oxford. We've been popping up all over the city for nearly 20 years now and we hope to still be taking our audiences exploring in 20 years' time. Oh, and don't think we'll be letting that milestone pass without one heck of a party, watch this space...



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