

A Brief History of the Stephen Joseph Committee of ABTT

In September 2017, an assorted group of theatre professionals and alumni from the early years of the Drama Department of Manchester University met at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Stephen Joseph's untimely death.

The following November, the 'Legacy Group' met again for a symposium at the University of Manchester. They joined the academic staff and students from the drama department in a series of practical explorations of text and staging, and in reminiscences of Stephen, who had been the first Fellow (1962) and later, a lecturer in the newly formed Drama Department. All the alumni who attended had vivid and fond memories of Stephen, which they were happy to share with the present day undergraduates. The conference was supported with an A4 brochure by and about the alumni from the early years of the department and the symposium presentations were later published in a book entitled 'Remembering Stephen Joseph'.

The events at Scarborough and Manchester were seen as the catalyst for future research and events and a core group subsequently met regularly online, from 2018 on, in what became the Stephen Joseph Association (SJA). The aim was to promote the wide ranging contribution that Stephen had made to British Theatre and to celebrate the centenary of his birth in 2021. Meetings have been held at the Theatre and Performance department of the V&A where Sam Walters the founder of the Orange Tree theatre, Richmond was the guest speaker and at the Playground Theatre, in London. This last meeting incorporated presentations from theatre practitioners Faynia Williams, Richard Crane, David Roger and Iain Mackintosh.

Stephen died tragically young at the age of 46 but was prodigious in the breadth of his output. He founded theatres in Scarborough and Stoke on Trent, both working in-the-round, a form of theatre passionately promoted in his lifetime. He was also a founder member of the Association of British Theatre Technicians, (ABTT) and Association of Theatre Consultants and in 2020 the SJA was invited to join the ABTT as one of their committees. In January 2021 the committee voted to change their name to the Stephen Joseph Committee of the ABTT with Alistair Livingstone as Chairman.

Currently, and in association with the ABTT, the committee is about to launch the Stephen Joseph Award for innovative theatre. A New Play Development Award is also scheduled for mid-2021, in cooperation with the Playground Theatre, London as well as a series of online ABTT-SJC seminars. Also, in 2021 it is hoped to contribute to celebrations of Stephen's work at the drama department of the University of Manchester.

Christine Stott
SJC Hon. Secretary