

Stephen Joseph Association



Constituted as a committee of ABTT

23 April 2020

Dear Colleagues

As we enter the next phase of the Corona Virus lockdown and all our theatres are dark, our actors, technicians and other creatives find themselves with little or no income or occupation, and our plans for the 2021 Centenary of Stephen's birth are on hold, perhaps it is not untimely to reflect on how the SJA came into being, what has been achieved to date and our aspirations for the future.

The resilient spirit that categorised Stephen has found new ways to express itself and to provide entertainment, as well as thought provoking material. The question I ask at this extraordinary moment in mankind's history is 'what we can achieve in 2021 to promote Stephen Joseph's legacy and why is it still important to do so?'

Prior to joining the ABTT in 2019, a group of alumni from Manchester University and professional theatre practitioners including Alan Ayckbourn, Terry Lane and Richard Pilbrow met informally at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough to mark the 50th anniversary of Stephen's death. The group reconvened at the Martin Harris Centre for Music and Drama at Manchester University in November 2017, for a Symposium to explore his legacy. These events gave rise to a number of publications with a limited circulation including an A5 booklet created and edited by Peter Thompson and an A4 brochure which included reminiscences, evaluation and obituaries. More recently a book which was based on transcripts of the Manchester talks: *Remembering Stephen Joseph*, was published by a team consisting of Bob Millington, Athene Fielding, Tony Jackson, with financial support from the SJA.

Peter Ellis Jones, Terry Wilton, Joanna Tope, Csilla Toldy, Alistair Livingstone and Athene Fielding agreed to become the founder members of the association and Terry Lane agreed to become the first Chairman. Terry had worked with Stephen at Scarborough and Stoke in the early years of theatre-in-the-round and later became the designer/builder and director of the first Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. Along the way several of the original committee retired for personal and work related reasons, but have all continued to be active behind the scenes. Terry stood down as Chairman in July having ably steered us through the formative years.

In 2019 Tony Jackson and Paul Gibson joined the committee and have been assiduous in reshaping the constitution and maintaining links with Manchester University and the Manchester International Festival, both of which are supportive of the SJA but, under the present financial constraints and the pandemic are, like most organisations, not making future plans.

We have been trying to get something on to the radio for next year, and we have written to Mathew Parris who hosts *Great Lives* on the BBC, but so far without a response. There is an existing radio documentary on theatre-in-the-round, which was made several years ago by Faynia Williams and Richard Bannerman for BBC and features the voices of: Alan Ayckbourn, Tom Courtenay, Martin Carthy, Alison Chitty and Robert Powell and may well be worth another airing, given the necessary copyright and clearance permissions. We have also suggested various awards in SJ's name with relevant organisations including playwriting, stage management and a technicians award and we are in contact with David Edelstein and Caroline Rouse who administer technical awards for the ABTT.

Stephen Joseph was a founder member of the Association of British Theatre Technicians in 1961 and the SJA formalised its agreement to become a Committee of ABTT during the AGM at the Playground Theatre, London on 20th. September, 2019. This was followed with presentations by Peter Tate, the Playground's founding director and theatre practitioners Faynia Williams, Richard Crane, David Roger and Iain Mackintosh on the theme: ***SPACE AND PLACE - theatre challenges in the 21st century***, followed by a lively debate chaired by Richard Bunn on behalf of ABTT. The questions that were posed at the seminar have become even more prescient now. We do have recordings and transcripts of the seminar and these could form the basis for a new publication with additional material from our own and ABTT's archives.

The SJA now has some 50 subscription members and their annual automatic renewals will now run off at the end of the year. As they do so future renewals will need to be made directly with ABTT. At that point existing members will have the option to either continue with a simple SJA subscription or to opt to upgrade to join one of the ABTT membership categories in order to take advantage of a range of ABTT benefits, including regular Sightline publications.

At the same time all existing ABTT members are cordially encouraged to join the SJA Committee, which they can do within their existing membership, at no additional cost. They can do this by contacting the ABTT Administrative Co-ordinator at: office@abtt.org.uk.

The SJA steering committee has worked extremely hard to effect the move to join the ABTT and whilst many of our plans are on temporary hold, we are still working and planning for 2021 which is not only the centenary of Stephen's birth but also the 60th. anniversary of the inception of ABTT. We see the collaboration with the various ABTT committees as a way of maximising the potential to celebrate and further investigate Stephen's extraordinary, but largely forgotten, legacy; whether through the medium of online platforms or by more traditional methods.

We will especially welcome any ABTT members who would like to join us and we need all the support and collaborative effort of ALL our members to celebrate Stephen, his life, his work and the legacy that has given rise to the myriad forms of staging and possibilities current today.

Please feel free to contact me personally if you are able to help make 2021 a memorable and fitting tribute to this maverick genius and theatre pioneer who has influenced so many of us.

Alistair
SJA/ABTT Committee Chairman
alistair@alistairlivingstone.com
+44 (0) 74 0213 1355

**SJA/ABTT Committee: Chairman: Alistair Livingstone; Secretary: Christine Stott
Members: Terry Lane, Andrew Sanders, Csilla Toldy, Tony Jackson, Paul Gibson.
Patrons: Professor Peter Thomson, Roland Joffe, Richard Pilbrow**