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FACTORY FUTURES

The Factory was founded in 2006, a theatre company that aimed to put creative input back into the hands of actors.

They first grabbed the attention of audiences and the media with their guerrilla performances of Hamlet, where the audience chose the cast just moments before the start of the show. This summer the company premiered a version of Chekhov's The Seagull which went even further, removing the script altogether and presenting entirely improvised performances every show.

In April this year they launched Factory Futures, a series of workshops for actors and writers aged 17-21. Alex Hassell, co-artistic director of The Factory, explains why.

"We realised that a huge percentage of our audiences are really young and largely non-theatre-goers. Because we've got no money we've only ever marketed our shows in the same ways that gigs and raves are marketed, so it's in a language that they are far more familiar with than older people.

I also think the fact that we wear our own clothes and have no set possibly makes a difference and that lots of us are younger than might perform in other productions. We also play in weird places like pubs, clubs, rooftops and tunnels and the shows are massively different every time.

I think that young people have learnt that you get a very different experience when you see a Factory show than when you see a normal show. We've been really inspired by their immediate and seemingly very deep enthusiasm for what we're doing.

To approach acting in the way we do at the Factory means we have to get rid of loads of preconceived ideas about theatre and acting and we were interested to see if any of the actual method by which we make such stuff could be translated to young people.

In fact they've put us all to shame. We set loads of rules: we said, 'if you're here you're being really brave and if you get anything wrong you don't have to say sorry or be embarrassed about it'. They picked that up amazingly quickly. We also set rules that you mustn't stop. If you feel weird, just keep going. And don't repeat yourself: try new things all the time - and they were so up for it. I think they found it playful and mischievous, which is as it should be.

We didn't intend to necessarily make the whole first term Shakespeare, it's just that when you start, there's so much to do and it's so good. We also didn't want to pussyfoot around: let's just go for the hardest thing. So we started with one of the hardest speeches in Hamlet and it was like, 'well, why not?' Let's not patronise them, let's test ourselves to see if we can get this across so they can understand and do this really difficult stuff.

As far as writing and acting are concerned I think if you're interested and want to have a go then you should. Writers and actors are just people who had a go and found they liked it and were good at it. If you think about yourself as a writer or an actor or a director, we constantly find that's almost the largest problem, that you, your ego or your idea of what that means is largely what gets in the way of everything.

We set up Factory Futures because we liked the idea that young people could do it as well, that they could do their own stuff, not to think that it's completely inaccessible. You don't always need loads of money, a theatre, costumes and all those sorts of things. Passion and talent can be enough.

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Alex Hassell was talking to Jo Caird

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