**It’s warm up North: training and opportunities for actors living in North East England**

Dr. Adelle Hulsmeier

Overcoming the stigma that suggests the North East of England offers limited opportunities to actors, both trained and un-trained, is difficult. At a time when travel and movement is significantly restricted, this article is timely in putting some of the more progressive opportunities offered in the North East of England on the map. It offers an overview of some of the exciting and progressive opportunities that are currently offered in this region, particularly Newcastle and Sunderland, hopefully helpful to today’s aspirant actors when thinking about the extent of opportunities that may exist ‘closer to home’ or that may be worth re-locating for.

**Sunderland Culture, Sunderland.**

Sunderland Culture, of which the Music, Arts and Culture *(MAC)* Trust, the University of Sunderland and Sunderland City Council are the founding partners, is a new organisation which was created to bring together Sunderland’s most important cultural assets and activities.

This cultural initiative enjoys the benefits of the National Glass Centre, the Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens, the Sunderland Empire and a new 400-seat venue due to open at the Fire Station in partnership with Live Theatre and DanceCity.

The City-Wide Programme includes intimate theatre performances in hidden spaces, spectacles across the River Wear and events such as *Wonderlopper* and Danny Boyle’s *Pages of the Sea* on Roker Beach for the 2018 Armistice.

The new and exciting Fire Station which sits in Sunderland’s Music, Arts and Cultural quarter, is the city’s newest cultural venue. It offers dance classes, theatre workshops and a heritage centre. Live Theatre’s Live Tales and DanceCity also operate from the venue. In 2021 a mid-scale auditorium will also open at the venue.

**Live Theatre, Newcastle.**

Live Theatre has an international reputation as a new writing theatre. As well as producing and presenting new plays, there are extensive artistic opportunities for anyone looking to develop their acting skills from ages 11+.

The Elevator Programme supports the early career development of independent artists in the North East and across the UK. It incorporates writing courses and script developmental opportunities, bursaries and space for companies to develop new work.

Elevator is an annual festival which allows artists to present new theatre in Live Theatre’s venue. Since 2014 Elevator has launched 25 brand new plays, worked with 17 associate artists and awarded 16 bursaries.

Every year, Live Theatre select emerging theatre artists/companies to be their associate artists, benefiting from exclusive opportunities and support such as mentoring and development time and space.

For young people Live Theatre offers the largest free youth theatre in the region, open to ages 11-25. Over 3 terms you can develop skills in stage craft, develop a new play to perform and explore scripts that have been produced and performed at Live Theatre. Young people aged 11 - 25 can also join the Wordplay group to explore the world of spoken word.

Arts Award is a national accredited qualification designed to grow young people as artists and arts leaders. Live Theatre often works in partnership with organisations such as The Prince’s Trust as well as its own Youth Theatre members, and Live Theatre’s plays, post-show talks and workshops can support young people to achieve Arts Award. Students taking Arts Award at Live Theatre have a 100% pass rate.

Creative Careers Week offers work experience for ages 14-18. 10 students are offered experience placements where they are introduced to the creative production, development, and finance and marketing departments within Live Theatre. Students can also work as a collective to creatively devise a 10 - 15 minute performance throughout the week.

Volunteer roles at Live Theatre are varied and available in Live Tales (a children and young people’s writing centre) and in other areas of Live Theatre’s work. They include supporting and encouraging children and young people to write, illustrating their stories or leading tours of the buildings. All volunteers receive ongoing training and support, a programme of social events and some discounts at Live Theatre. There are volunteering opportunities at Live Theatre, Newcastle, and The Fire Station, Sunderland.

**Project A, Newcastle Theatre Royal, Newcastle**

Project A is a 1 year actor training programme, delivered from within Newcastle’s Theatre Royal. Delivery takes place over 3 terms and 18 students are accepted on the programme each year. They have access to the main house auditorium, visiting professionals, studio theatre, rehearsal room and dedicated training space.

Now in its 5th year, Project A have 59 graduates, with 90% working professionally or gaining agent representation within 6 months of graduation.

The course is full time and students are expected to attend between 25-45 hours a week. In term 1 you develop performance skills in relation to character creation and vocal and physical development. Term 2 is delivered by associate specialists and covers areas such as business, Shakespeare, Meisner and screen. The final term is the production term which takes students into an intensive rehearsal process, culminating in a showcase performance at the Theatre Royal.

**Alphabetti Theatre, Newcastle**

Alphabetti is an fringe venue in Newcastle that creates, produces, and programmes original work from emerging artists in music, theatre, comedy and poetry.

While they predominantly programme original work across the performing arts, if you’ve got an idea that doesn’t quite sit in that section, they advise you still get in touch.

**Northern Stage, Newcastle**

Northern Stage is the largest producing theatre company in the North East of England. Northern Stage Filmmakers is a course for 16-25 year olds in partnership with My Life Productions, Woodhorn Museum and The Heritage Lottery Fund. During the course you can learn all aspects of filmmaking, including acting, directing, writing, producing, camera, sound and editing. The group produce a 30-minute documentary and a 15-minute fictional film (based on the true stories of the documentary) premiered at Northern Stage and Alnwick Playhouse.

Specialist Work Placements are open to Further Education and Higher Education Students, as well as bespoke professional placements for people already in the industry or seeking to learn more. The placements are open for 6 weeks a year and are tailored to meet the needs of the applicant.

NORTH training programme supports the development of North-East based performers and theatre companies. It comprises of actor training, small-scale touring and company development. Applicants must be 20+ at the time the course begins.

For younger creatives there are opportunities in their young company (open to 16 – 21 year olds covering three different programmes; the collective, the ensemble and the team) and open stages courses (weekly drama sessions for ages 5-7, 8-11 and 12-15).

A play in 10 weeks tops up knowledge and skills of the rehearsal process. The workshops cover working with script, character development, devising and performing.

North East-based theatre companies and individual theatre-makers can also apply to NORTH to support company development. Successful applicants could receive 1 week R&D time in the Byker rehearsal space, 1 day with the associate director of Northern Stage, 6 essential skills workshops and 4 hours with a member of the Northern stage staff who can support ideas.

Each year Northern Stage will produce a small-scale touring production, featuring emerging North East actors.

**Curious Monkey, Newcastle**

Curious Monkey is an international award winning theatre company based in Newcastle and founded by artistic director Amy Golding. They offer volunteer placements for students or graduates looking for experience working within a professional theatre company, and from time to time they run bespoke internships for people who are interested in working in theatre.

Troupe is o**pen to 14 – 21 year olds with a care background or living in supported accommodation.** It offers a unique opportunity to get involved in theatre by seeing shows and shadowing professionals. The programme offers monthly theatre trips to one of Newcastle’s cultural venues, accompanied by short workshop on the performances viewed, a Q&A before the performance, a backstage tour, and a chance to meet the artists involved in making the show. This programme offers opportunities to undertake master classes and workshops with professional artists that explore different theatre skills, ranging from stand-up comedy to lighting, set design or sound recording. There is also the opportunity to shadow artists on theatre projects and work alongside Curious Monkey’s creative teams, gaining experience of different roles within theatre.

Play Club is a group of people (directors/writers/actors/ theatre lovers) who get together once a month to read a play together out loud.

Shoal Artist Network is a group of artists making and producing live performance work, held at Space Six. It is an opportunity for artists and producers to meet and share skills, advice and mentoring, pose questions, provocations and ideas and meet collaborators, audiences and new friends.

Theatre Monkey invites theatre practitioners, directors, facilitators and students to meet and share skills. Practical workshops are introduced and each participant will be invited to share an exercise. The workshop is followed by the Theatre Monkey tea party – an informal networking opportunity that allows artists to share tricks of the trade and link up with other freelance theatre makers.

**Final Thoughts**

There is a plethora of opportunities for emerging and training artists to engage with. It will always be important to ensure that you are honing and updating your skills, and the aforementioned opportunities offer a broad range of exciting things to get involved with. They come with networking opportunities, access to industry professionals and chances to work in exciting theatre venues. Establish how proactive you want to be and pursue the opportunities that are available to you – weekends, evenings, holidays – there are opportunities available all year round, and experiences available that are diverse and exciting, which you may wish to pursue. Remember: this is not limited to London, it’s warm up North too!

**Important Links**

Sunderland Culture: <https://sunderlandculture.org.uk/>

Live Theatre: <https://www.live.org.uk/>

Project A: <https://www.theatreroyal.co.uk/taking-part/project-a>

Alphabetti Theatre: <https://www.alphabettitheatre.co.uk/>

Northern Stage: <https://www.northernstage.co.uk/>

Curious Monkey: <https://curiousmonkeytheatre.com/>

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