

Drama at Oxford

A guide for Freshers and returning students

2016-17

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Dear all,

Welcome to drama in Oxford! We hope that you'll find this guide useful during your time in one of the busiest and most diverse university drama scenes in the world. This is the first time that a document like this has been produced, and we've written it in the hope that it will help you make the most of all that we do here.

The key thing about student drama in Oxford is that it's a world that is always open to anyone who wants to be part of it. At first, the range of opportunities available might seem almost intimidatingly broad. We make every kind of theatre here, from traditional plays to new writing to physical theatre to dance to comedy to opera - and more. There's room for you to learn every kind of theatrical skill, whether you want to act, direct, produce, stage manage, design or be part of a technical team. There's scope for you to join one of the larger, established parts of the Oxford drama scene, like the International Shakespeare Tour, or to create your own individual project. During your time here you can make films, write plays, paint set, rig lights, run a production company, and learn both from your fellow students and from experts from the world of professional theatre. You can work in a wide range of different theatres and spaces, across all genres, and make friends for life.

Theatremaking is a fundamentally collaborative process, and there's always room for an extra pair of hands. It's also constantly evolving to reflect how the world itself is changing, and therefore urgently needs new ideas and new talent every week. We want you to be a part of this. If you haven't already signed up to the drama newsletter, email me (drama.officer@admin.ox.ac.uk) to receive a bulletin at the start of every week packed full of the shows and opportunities of the moment. Join the many Facebook groups and pages dedicated to various parts of drama in Oxford, do Cuppers if that's your thing, and come to chat to me or to the President of OUDS, Christopher White, about how to get started. We're looking forward to meeting you!

Oxford University Dramatic Society (OUDS)

The Society

OUDS is the umbrella organisation for drama at Oxford University. Our job is to offer funding and support to any student companies wishing to put on any kind of production, and also to organise workshops run by some of the leading professionals in the theatre industry. We are an elected committee of 12 people, all of whom have different roles (costume, new writing, college reps, socials...), and we meet once a week to discuss any issues that might have arisen or to plan our annual events. The most important of these are Cuppers, the college drama competition for Freshers in Michaelmas Term, and the New Writing Festival in Hilary Term.

The most important thing to know about OUDS is that we do not put on plays as a society. We are not a 'drama company' as such, much more a facilitator for others. We are the group that put on Freshers events such as the Introduction to Oxford Drama and the OUDS drinks, hopefully making you feel at ease and helping you meet people you would want to work with later on in your university career.

To get into drama at Oxford, the first point of call is always Cuppers, the Freshers' drama competition. Because most of the Michaelmas terms shows will have probably been cast the term before, Cuppers is a low-stress environment in which you can get to know the team at your own college and also figure out how we deal with get-ins/get-outs and all of that (see the Cuppers section). Once Cuppers has finished, the auditions for the next term's round of shows are coming up, which means you can either audition for them or go full out and bid to direct/produce a show yourself - there will be workshops about this nearer the time.

The most important thing is to keep trying. OUDS and drama at Oxford might seem huge and scary at first but the more questions you ask and the more you put yourself out there, the more likely you'll be to get cast/get a role on a production team/get a show slot. Enthusiasm and dedication go a long way, and OUDS will be here to hopefully make that transition into university drama as smooth and easy as possible.

president@ouds.org

Cuppers

Cuppers is an annual drama festival run by OUDS and TAFF, dedicated to helping launch Freshers straight into theatre in Oxford. The festival challenges each college to create a team (or teams) of first-year actors, directors, technical designers and marketing producers, who will put on a theatrical piece at the Burton Taylor Studio in 5th week of Michaelmas term.

Shows can be of any genre, with past shows including: new writing, comedy, improvised drama, dance, and even drunk Shakespeare performances! Every show is watched by a panel of judges who will provide individual feedback while also selecting the ten best performances which will go on to perform again on the Saturday of 5th week. The festival culminates with an award ceremony to celebrate the most exciting new talent in Oxford drama, including handing out the coveted 'Best of Cuppers' award.

Whether you are interested in pursuing drama at Oxford, or just fancy trying a new experience with other freshers from your college, Cuppers is the place to start. To get involved contact your OUDS representative, and attend the meeting they will hold filled with ideas for what you and your college can do. For more information go to www.ouds.org/cuppers, or attend other OUDS freshers events, where OUDS committee members will be happy to answer any of your questions.

College Reps

The College Reps are 2nd or 3rd years in almost every college in Oxford. Their job is to help Freshers get settled into Oxford drama, help out with Cuppers competition in 5th week, and mainly to be the way for OUDS to communicate with college communities. This year we have a very strong group of college reps which is really exciting for the new Freshers coming in; they will certainly have some experienced and friendly people able to help them settle in. Make sure to check out the website if you are not sure who your college rep is, and get in touch with them if you have any questions!

The OUDS/Thelma Holt International Shakespeare Tour

The prestigious OUDS/Thelma Holt International Shakespeare Tour runs annually during the summer vacation. It is instigated, overseen and underwritten by London theatre producer Thelma Holt, and directed and produced by students. The tour visits several venues in the UK including the Southwark Playhouse, Hatfield House and the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford, before going to perform at theatres internationally.

The play for the 2016 tour was 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Applications for the positions of producer and director will be open over Christmas, with a deadline in January.

The OUDS National Tour(s)

The National Tour is a summer tour which performs in Oxford, usually a few other cities and then heads up to Edinburgh for the entire month-long Fringe Festival. It is sponsored partly by OUDS, and is a really great way to be part of a full-scale tour process, with auditions early in the year and performances over the entire summer. The very existence of the National Tour depends on the strength of the show applying, sometimes even leading to two separate productions, as happened in 2015 – 'Jekyll' by Hypnotist Theatre Company and 'Around the World in 80 Days' by

Curious Grin Productions. Earlier tours include 'The Alchemist' by Ben Jonson, 'Alice in Wonderland', 'Machinal' and 'The Little Prince'. Depending on the quality of the applications received, the OUDS National Tour is not guaranteed to take place each year.

The National Tour process usually begins at the start of Hilary term, when all bidding companies must submit a full bid to the OUDS committee (usually consisting of director, producer, marketing and design statements, design sketches and a full, comprehensive budget). These are then called to either one or two rounds of interviews, after which OUDS makes the decision of which show/s they want to sponsor. This does not mean that other Edinburgh shows can't apply for funding, the National Tour is just unique in the amount of funding it gets from OUDS and the ability to use the name 'OUDS National Tour'. Auditions usually quickly follow, and rehearsals begin after the summer exam season finishes.

The National Tour is an amazing opportunity to experience the life of a touring company. Cities visited in the past have included Birmingham, Buxton, London, Manchester and many more. Since it's a full 2 1/2 month commitment, the camaraderie which develops between the team is extraordinary – you live, sleep and dream theatre together. It also gives students the chance to plan a fully-functional tour trip, from booking the venues and raising the money to transporting props and actors to wherever you want them to be. It's such a fantastic opportunity to be able to do something of that scale while still in university and really helps you understand the pressures and excitements of professional touring companies.

TAFF: technical theatre in Oxford

Tab's Are For Flying (TAFF) is the Oxford University Society for Theatre Technicians and Designers. We provide support, advice and training to everybody working on the technical side of student theatre in Oxford, and we also work to promote safe working practices amongst all technicians.

TAFF primarily exists through its very active mailing list, where people can post any questions they have, and more importantly where they can advertise crew positions for upcoming productions. Every member of TAFF is a member of this mailing list, and will receive these emails with questions and opportunities.

TAFF also organises various social events (including regular trips to the pub), and termly training days where you can gain new theatrical skills.

For more information about TAFF, see our website at

<https://www.tabsareforflying.co.uk>.

The Cameron Mackintosh Drama Fund

The Oxford drama community is very fortunate to have the support of the Cameron Mackintosh Drama Fund and London theatre producer Thelma Holt CBE.

The Cameron Mackintosh Drama Fund

The Cameron Mackintosh Drama Fund provides financial support to shows throughout the year in the form of grants and underwriting, which are advertised by the Drama Officer. Applications are usually received towards the end of term, and are considered at the Cameron Mackintosh Drama Fund board meeting, which is generally in 9th week.

The Cameron Mackintosh Professor of Contemporary Theatre

Each year, St Catherine's College hosts a distinguished figure from the world of theatre as the Cameron Mackintosh Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre, with the aim of promoting interest in, and the study and practice of, contemporary theatre at Oxford. The Professor generally gives an inaugural lecture and at least two follow-up workshops. Previous Professors have included Sir Richard Eyre, Sir Trevor Nunn, Stephen Daldry, Meera Syal, Phyllida Lloyd and Sir Alan Ayckbourn. The current Visiting Professor (for the year 2016-17) is Claude-Michel Schönberg.

Thelma Holt CBE

Thelma Holt CBE is a professional theatre producer who held the position of Visiting Professor in 1998. In addition to overseeing the OUDS/Thelma Holt International Shakespeare Tour every year, Thelma runs surgeries once or twice a term in which she gives tailored advice to students who wish to pursue a career in theatre. These surgeries are advertised on the drama newsletter each term. Thelma also oversees the annual Actors' Showcase, at which the best actors in their final year have the opportunity to perform to an invited group of agents at a London theatre.

The University Drama Officer

The University Drama Officer is a position in university administration funded by the Cameron Mackintosh Foundation. The position is usually filled by a recent Oxford graduate. The job of the Drama Officer is to catalyse and support all activities in university drama. This includes programming work at venues hosting student productions, arranging workshops and events, assisting with applications and interviews for various positions in student drama, organising various annual events such as the Actors' Showcase, and giving advice to individual productions. The current UDO is Alexander Newton. You can contact him at drama.officer@admin.ox.ac.uk or on 01865 791 577, or find him in his office at the Burton Taylor Studio.

Venues hosting student productions in Oxford

The Oxford Playhouse

The Oxford Playhouse is the largest venue hosting student productions in Oxford. This 613-seat theatre is situated on Beaumont Street in the centre of town, and integrates high-quality student work into a full programme of professional shows. There are usually two week-long slots in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms, and one week-long slot and one one-night slot in Trinity Term, although these slots can vary. Applications for a show at the Playhouse are generally made two terms before the desired slot date, and will consist of a bid submission around 3rd week and an interview with Oxford Playhouse staff, a Senior Member of OUDS and the Drama Officer a week or two later.

The first step towards putting on work at the Oxford Playhouse is to go to see as many productions in the venue as possible, to get an impression of its scope and potential and of the kind of audiences it draws. It is also crucial to look at the work that previous companies (both student and non) have done there, and to talk to the Drama Officer about the ins and outs of mounting a production at the venue. Putting on a show in a large venue such as this presents a commercial as well as an artistic challenge and it is important to do your research thoroughly.

Bids for the Oxford Playhouse should comprise a cover letter written jointly by the director and the producer of the show, explaining your motivation for wanting to work at this venue and your vision for the production you want to create. They should also include statements from the remainder of the creative team, design sketches, a comprehensive budget and a marketing plan.

Doing a play at Oxford Playhouse is incredible; it is, by far, the single most professional opportunity available to young theatremakers in Oxford. The enormity of the venue, the expertise of the staff, and the scrutiny of a massive public audience simply forces you to raise your game. It's great! Really scary, but you get a lot of support from the Playhouse Staff, the UDO, and typically getting the Playhouse will mean you should be able to find a really great student production team and cast.

*So don't be put off by the scale of the venue, because the help will be there if you get it. Contrary to a lot of advice from our peers before we bid with our show, *The Pillowman* by Martin McDonagh, OP is genuinely open to accepting all kinds of theatre on their main stage. If you're passionate and motivated about your project, chances are they will believe in it too, and - even if your bid is unsuccessful - it's a very formative application process to go through.*

So, once you've done a couple of shows in some of the brilliant smaller venues in Oxford, it's definitely worth grabbing some close collaborators and coming up with a bid for OP. This may be your only chance for a while to make exciting theatre happen in a huge, professional venue.

Tom Bailey, director of *The Pillowman* (Michaelmas 2014)

The Burton Taylor Studio

The Burton Taylor Studio is part of the Oxford Playhouse, and is housed in the same building. It has its own entrance on Gloucester Street around the corner from the main Playhouse entrance.

The BT is the university student theatre, and during weeks 2-8 in term time it hosts a full programme of student shows. Week 1 is always given over to student workshops, and the studio hosts a professional programme during the vacations. There are two evening slots: one 90-minute slot at 7.30pm, and one 60-minute slot at 9pm. In special cases, there may be a 'double slot', which allows for a longer production starting at 7.30pm. The audience capacity of the studio is 50, and shows can have a maximum cast size of 8. It is a flexible black-box space and suitable for both conventional and experimental work. It is an ideal space for new writing.

The BT is run by a full-time general manager, Robert Bristow, who conducts all production meetings and oversees get-ins and get-outs. It is also where the Drama Officer's office is located.

The call for bids for the Burton Taylor Studio is generally put out in Week 5 each term, with a deadline the following week and interviews that week or the week after.

It was a pleasure to work with the whole crew at the Burton Taylor Studio to put on the first Oxford Italian Play, Serata Futurista, in week 8 of Hilary Term (10-14 March 2015). The play offered an opportunity for 8 cast members, 9 production crew members, and nearly 250 audience members to experience a rare encounter with avant-garde, Futurist theatre (it is, to our knowledge, the first performance of these Futurist scenes in the UK; they were originally published, in Italy, in 1915, and most have never been translated into English). Presented in Italian with English summaries, the play constituted a valuable chance for language-learning through theatre; it also served to broaden students' and community members' cultural knowledge of Italy and the traditions of the Italian stage.

We were impressed by the extraordinary interest that the performance inspired in the community (with two sold out performances and none with more than 5 open seats), particularly given the anticipated challenges of marketing a performance in Italian, without subtitles, featuring avant-garde work that is often perceived as less accessible or mainstream.

Michael Subialka, director/producer of *Serata Futurista* (Hilary 2015)

The Keble O'Reilly

The O'Reilly is the perfect space to put on a medium sized show. If you want to put on a musical, a highly technical production, or you need a space bigger than the BT, but as flexible in seating arrangements and far more technical – this is the place for you.

It's an 180-seat theatre that can be arranged in pretty much any configuration from end on, thrust, in the round, or even in promenade the space can be whatever you want it to be.

On top of that, as you won't be sharing the space with another production company and you have a three day get in, there's room turn the space into whatever you want it to be – as long as it's returned to the exact condition you found it in.

Marketing an O'Reilly show is probably one of the most difficult spaces to market in Oxford – with the potential for almost 1000 people to attend you need to work hard to make them want to see your show – but if you work hard it's completely doable. Bids are submitted in 5th week to the committee with interviews that weekend – the committee expect to see a full team, and statements from the director, producer, designers and marketing managers as a minimum. As a hugely competitive space to bid for, don't be afraid to get in contact with the committee (<http://www.oreillytheatre.co.uk/#!about-us/cihc>) to ask for more information about bids and past productions.

The Keble O'Reilly theatre offers the perfect balance of size and intimacy in Oxford. This allows productions to be expansive and technically accomplished without sacrificing the subtlety of performances usually confined to studio theatres. For actors, it is the sheer variety of styles the O'Reilly can accommodate that make it an invaluable space. Hosting anything from high naturalism and musical theatre, to Shakespearian tragedies and new writing, the O'Reilly gives actors the chance to expand the breadth of their performances in a large scale, professional setting. Oxford's most adaptable theatre provides a space in which directors, actors and technicians can be bold with the productions they put on.

Ieuan Perkins

The Simpkins Lee Theatre (Lady Margaret Hall)

The Simpkins Lee at LMH is a hidden treasure in the university, bustling with drama and arts. The intimate setting seats 136 people and includes use of production facilities including lighting.

Companies wishing to use the space for a slot should email drama.officer@admin.ox.ac.uk by sixth week, which will then be put to the theatres student run committee with an outcome by eighth week. There will be a possibility of two productions being put on in Hilary and another in Trinity.

The Simpkins Lee is a bit of a hidden gem in Oxford and a pleasure to work in. Although it doesn't have a lot of room for set changes, the stage is quite large and has four entrances which allows for a lot of freedom in how a play looks. Two of these entrances require going through the audience and another path through them allows moments in the play to have a level of intimacy few other theatres in Oxford offer. In Punk Rock we utilised this for intense scene change routines by anonymised masked students, and a monologue to finish the play in which my closeness to the audience as I walked through it tied them into to the events of the play and made them seem just as culpable for its dramatic denouement as any scripted character. This intimacy of audience and characters is

striking and hard to achieve in many other theatres, and whilst the trip to LMH makes it slightly more challenging for the marketing team, the Simpkins Lee is a theatre worth considering because it can bring the right play to life.

Hamish Forbes, who played William Carlisle in *Punk Rock* (Trinity 2015)

The Michael Pilch Studio (Balliol)

During Michaelmas Term 2015, the Michael Pilch Studio on Jowett Walk was transformed into a highly flexible, fully equipped, and entirely student run venue. Now one of the most versatile venues in Oxford, the Studio has since hosted some of the most fearless and experimental theatre staged this year, and Michaelmas 2016 promises to be just as dazzling.

From the Experimental Theatre Club's daring undertaking of Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker*; to Lucy Kirkwood's *It Felt Empty* in collaboration with the charity Clean Break; to Pilch regulars Poltergeist Theatre returning with a chilling, winter reimagining of Shakespeare's *Much Ado*; the quality of this term's line up promises to be as exceptional as ever.

Every term the Pilch accepts bids from any Oxford University production company. The competition continues to grow each term, and we look forward to receiving bids for Hilary 2017.

To keep up to date on What's On, to find out more information about the venue, to pursue through our Archives, or to find information about bid application deadlines, don't forget to follow us on twitter @ThePilchStudio, like us on Facebook, and check out our website: www.pilchstudio.com.

The North Wall Arts Centre

The North Wall Arts Centre is a professional theatre in Summertown, North Oxford. There is a flexible, 200-seat main house which is particularly great for in-the-round productions, and a smaller studio space.

There is one annual slot at the North Wall for student productions from Oxford University. This slot is in Trinity Term, and it is dedicated to new writing and adaptations of existing texts. Applications for the slot open before Michaelmas Term and the deadline is 21st October (Wednesday of 2nd week) for the 2016 slot.

In special cases, it is possible to request a single-night slot in the North Wall studio space. Please speak to the Drama Officer if you're interested in this.

Directing Zennor for The North Wall was an incredible opportunity to work outside the parameters of the student-based venues in Oxford. The theatre is a professional working venue that has an emphasis on New Writing which suited our process brilliantly: it gave us the thrilling (and rare!) opportunity to work with experienced professionals in a semi-professional environment and they

were hugely supportive of us. I would highly recommend the opportunity to any director who wants to create something bold and original in an incredibly cool theatre!

Sammy Glover, director of *Zennor* (Trinity 2015)

College auditoria

In addition to the theatres mentioned at Balliol, Lady Margaret Hall and Keble, there are college-managed auditoria in Pembroke, Corpus, Magdalen and Christ Church colleges. These venues have their own systems for booking and running the space, and it is best to get in touch with the College or a student representative directly, although you can go through the Drama Officer if you prefer. Often students at the college have priority when booking, and/or a member of the college is required on the team.

Garden plays

Garden plays are a renowned component of Oxford's theatrical life. For obvious reasons, they are usually put on in Trinity Term, although there have recently been brave outdoor productions of *Macbeth* and *Henry V* in winter. The procedure for putting on a garden play is this: pick a play, pick a suitable quad or garden, ask the college for permission, and get going. Often garden plays form a part of college arts festivals.

Other spaces

Venues for student productions are not limited to the spaces described above. Be inventive, and investigate churches, nightclubs, graveyards, College chapels and cloisters. Site-specific work can be amongst the most interesting in Oxford drama.

New Writing in Oxford

The New Writing Festival

The New Writing Festival is held at the Burton Taylor Studio every Hilary Term. It showcases the best new plays written by Oxford students each academic year. A shortlist of four scripts is selected by the OUDS Committee after a deadline at the end of 9th week of Michaelmas Term. This shortlist is then sent to a judge (usually a professional playwright). A winner is chosen by them, and a separate judge (a theatre critic or director) selects the best production during the week of performances. The performances run in rep at the BT. A best actor is selected by a theatrical agent.

NWF is an excellent opportunity for playwrights to develop their work with the support of other students and professional mentors. In 2016, it will be combined with the annual Kenneth Tynan Prize for Theatre Reviewing.

The New Writing Festival was my entry point into Oxford Drama. Applying as a first-time director, I was provided with all the resources (human and technical) to produce a play. It's a great place to look for new friends and challenging work with up-and-coming playwrights. The people I met doing the NWF eventually produced and production managed another play I did, and my playwright partner became a close friend and working partner (we went on to do three of her plays in total). Because of the NWF, I could go on to do four more productions in my year at Oxford.

Kate Bussert, director of *Twin Primes* (Hilary 2015)

Friday play readings in the BT

New writing is an important part of the drama scene at Oxford. Every Friday lunchtime, an unrehearsed reading of a new play is hosted at the Burton Taylor Studio, directed and read by a different group of students each week and observed by a small audience. After the reading there is time for discussion and feedback with the writer. The aim is to create a relaxed and constructive atmosphere for writers, actors and directors, and to invite the audience's thoughts and criticism on new texts. The readings are run by the UDO.

To submit a play for consideration for the Friday readings, please email it to fridayplayreadings@gmail.com. It will be read by the UDO and a couple of others, and a slot for it in the term's series of readings will hopefully be found. The play will be handed to a director on the Monday before the reading, and a cast (usually gender blind) will be drawn from a pool of actors who have signed up. 40 minutes before the reading, the director will meet the cast, distribute scripts, allocate parts and explain the text.

There are no particular criteria for plays submitted for the Friday readings except that they should be one hour or less in duration, or be an interesting freestanding excerpt of a longer text. As a general rule, you shouldn't submit material which you view as a completely finished product, because the readings are designed to help develop and improve material. We look for bold and thoughtful writing, and for writers who genuinely feel they could benefit from a lively and interactive reading of their text.

Comedy in Oxford

The Oxford Revue is the university's foremost comedy society, and is responsible for numerous shows throughout the year. Its regular comedy night, the Audrey, is open to everyone and auditions are held in the week leading up to the performance. All types of comedy, whether it's sketch or stand-up, solo or group, are welcome. The Revue also puts on larger scale shows at the Old Fire Station, as well as longer running sketch shows at various theatres in Oxford. Some sketch shows will have open auditions for anyone who wants to get involved in writing, performing or both, while others are exclusively written and performed by the members of this year's committee. The Revue also acts as a funding body for anyone who is looking to put on their own comedy show. All information about upcoming shows or how to get involved is sent out on the Oxford Revue mailing list, as well as posted on their Facebook page. Alternatively you can contact them at oxrevue@gmail.com. The year culminates with a month long run at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Film in Oxford

The Oxford University Filmmaking Foundation (OUFF) exists to support and promote filmmaking at Oxford. Whatever your area of interest or level of experience, we exist to help you make films. That means we run events and workshops on subjects from directing to lighting and crew networking events to help you meet people to make films with. We run Film Cuppers, an annual Screenwriting competition, and Easter Filmmaking Projects, as well as offering partial funding and kit for independent student short films.

Getting Involved:

Join our mailing list! This way, you'll keep up to date with events and crew calls. Go to groupspaces.com/ouff/join to signup.

Connect on Facebook. Add yourself to the OUFF (Oxford University Film Foundation) Facebook group, and join current students, alumni and locals to find filmmaking opportunities.

Come to an event! The old saying "it's not what you know, it's who you know" can sometimes be a useful mantra in the film world, so come and meet people at our events! Even better, say hello to one of the OUFF committee members and we can introduce you to other aspiring filmmakers. (Obviously, we think "it's what you know" is also quite important, so come to one of our workshops for tips!)

Film Cuppers. We will be running a 1-minute film competition in 6th and 7th week, shot on whatever you have to hand (like an iPhone). Check our website for the rules.

Join the crew of an OUFF-funded short. Check the OUFF newsletter, OUFF Facebook group or sometimes the TAFF mailing list for opportunities. You can also get to know people at our events. If you've never made a student short before, it's great to start as a Runner on a film shoot.

Make trailers for plays! It's the norm now for most student plays to have a trailer beforehand, so look out for drama opportunities.

Write a screenplay for our competition. Every Hilary term, we host an annual competition for short film scripts that will then be turned into real films by teams of students as part of the Easter Projects. There are usually 4 or 5 shorts chosen, and these must be able to be made on a tight budget by a group of students. If you're interested in making one of these films, we start accepting bids as soon as the winning scripts are announced. Look out for details in the newsletter and online!

Bid to us for funding/kit. We fund new student filmmaking through a process of bidding. This means getting a crew together and writing up a bid document that

details your bios, plans and budget. Examples are on our website. If we fund your film, you're entitled to use the OUFF Blackmagic Cinema Camera and lenses, along with the rest of our kit, so long as it's available and insured by you.

Still got questions?

Drop us an email to president@ouba.co.uk or get in touch with us, the presidents, Mischa Andreski and James Riding.

Opera in Oxford

Opera is a musical genre as much as it is a theatrical one. One can put on an opera as a concert performance, with limited or no acting and movement, but it is only when set, lights, costumes and full theatrical expression come together that its complete expressive potential can be realised. Of course the elements that make it so powerful render it also a very challenging genre to produce. Staging an opera, however, is a very rewarding experience and an endeavour really worth considering. If you decide to embark upon this great adventure, most of the advice outlined in this guide for producing a play applies, but here are a couple of additional points that you might like to take into account:

First of all, the core production team should include a music director, whose responsibility would be advising on musical matters, recruiting musicians, assisting the director in choosing the singers, leading the musical rehearsals and conducting the performances (if necessary). Due to its multifaceted nature, finding a producer (or team of producers) with some experience in both drama and music would be beneficial, so they can have a better grasp and control over every aspect of the production.

Making the right choice of repertoire is very important. For example, attempting to put on Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, however exciting it might sound, would be extremely difficult as most of the 19th-century operas require older singers with more developed voices, making it a very ambitious project in the context of the student opera scene. Baroque and early Classical operas from the 17th- and 18th-centuries are more suitable for younger voices due to the smaller orchestral forces they employ. The size of the orchestra should be taken into consideration not only because a big orchestra can overpower the singers (who sing without a microphone) and make organisation more complex, but also because of the venue, as apart from the Oxford Playhouse there are not many other venues that offer an orchestral pit, or that can house a big orchestra on stage while allowing space for the action to take place. A way to shrink the orchestra size to allow for more flexibility in terms of repertoire could be to find a composer to create a new arrangement of the orchestral accompaniment. A good composer could transform a 35-instrument orchestral score to a new version written for six or seven instruments, while keeping most of the colour and power of the music of the original composition. There are many students at the Faculty of Music specialising in composition who might be interested in getting involved. Creating and staging completely new operatic works written by students for students could also be another good option.

Opera, like theatre, is all about telling the story, so it is very important for the audience to be able to clearly follow the plot. Many operas are written in languages which the majority of the audience might not be able to understand, such as Italian, German, French or Russian. Two possibilities would be to either use an English translation of the opera (one that has already been published or even create your own) or use surtitles with the English translation projected over or at the side of the stage. It is also customary to provide a synopsis of the plot in the programme to enhance the audience's understanding and enjoyment. Finally, as a genre, opera can sometimes falsely appear as exclusive and impenetrable which could make

selling tickets a tricky business. This could be remedied with a good marketing campaign that focuses on inclusivity and targets both the theatre and music loving audience.

Musical theatre in Oxford

Musical Theatre at Oxford is really flourishing, with a huge increase in production and interest, as well as an exciting year ahead, starting off with *Singing in the Rain* at the Oxford Playhouse and *Spring Awakening* at the O'Reilly in Michaelmas term, and *RENT* in Hilary term, as well as *The Fairy Queen* in Trinity Term. Putting on a musical can seem like an absolutely huge task, but with so many talented musicians, directors, dancer and singers in Oxford, the excitement and the standard makes up for it. The Oxford Playhouse and the O'Reilly are usually the most popular venues for putting on musicals, having put on things like *The Producers*, *West Side Story*, *Chicago*, and *Sweeney Todd* over the past couple of years. These two venues have the most spacious stages and the biggest orchestra capacities, however there have been various musicals in the Burton Taylor Studio over the past couple of years, and there are certainly other venues to explore which would be really exciting. New or experimental musicals are also widely encouraged within Oxford and it would be great to see more of this.

The Experimental Theatre Club

The Experimental Theatre Club was founded in 1936 at Oxford University to explore new and experimental ways of creating theatre experiences. Since then, the ETC has undergone a number of transformations and existed in many different forms. It is now a hub for new writing and bold and unusual work in student drama. It comprises an auditioned company of actors, writers and directors, and hosts open workshops and productions every term. In 2015, the ETC played a major part in producing *Zennor*, the inaugural Oxford University production at the North Wall Arts Centre.

The current President of the ETC is Sammy Glover (samantha.glover@oriel.ox.ac.uk). Please check out the ETC's website (<http://www.experimentaltheatreclub.com>) or email Sammy directly for more information and to see the ETC's termcard.

The Edinburgh Fringe

They say the weather in Scotland goes through all four seasons in one day – performing at the Fringe, you'll be exasperated, exhilarated, hysterical from tiredness and widely enthusiastic all within seconds. There's no experience like the Fringe. You're performing alongside professional shows, seen by professional reviewers, and nothing teaches salesmanship like repeatedly pitching your show to dozens of passers-by.

If you're going to do the Fringe, start planning early (i.e. now). The venues fill up quickly – consider January late. Popular Oxford venues, like C Venues, get booked in October-December so start thinking. Be choosy about your venue – some work on a box office-split so the venue gets money from your ticket sales, for some you pay rent upfront and keep the receipts. Most venues give you comps to other shows in the venue (yay!) and always ask about press offers – who reviews their shows, do they have a good deal on flyers with a local printer (flyers. You always need more. I found eight people with 10,000 flyers for a two-week run was barely enough).

Focus on creating, not how much it will make. You can make the craziest show for the Fringe (my group's particular favourite was the B-musical 'Vampire Hospital Waiting Room'.) Be absolutely clear about what you want to do and what your show is about, particularly when writing blurbs for the Fringe website and brochure. We can all recognize waffle.

Finally, don't be dignified. Embrace every weird moment. It will be weird (I got pulled up on stage four times in three days) but you'll come home with amazing memories - and who knows? Perhaps you saw a show that completely changed how you saw theatre. Maybe you made an excellent contact for next year's show. Maybe you tried haggis. If you're serious about theatre, go to the Fringe, even as a visitor for a few days, and let your mind be blown.

Funding for productions

Every show in Oxford must be funded by a variety of funding bodies, so there's never any need to put any of your own money at risk. Producers should apply to these funding bodies when they are in the bidding process for venues or when they have a confirmed slot. You just need to email the venue bid and also your proposed budget and you'll then attend an interview with them. Normally the producer, director, marketing manager, production manager and designer are essential for these interviews. A list of the various funding bodies can be found in the weekly drama newsletter.

Once you've signed contracts and received your cheque for funding, you can then put on your production. Any profit or loss is passed back to these funding bodies depending on how much money they put in to begin with - so you don't need to worry about covering a loss. However, to receive funding you'll need a specific production company bank account, and although these are easy to set up, it can often take a few weeks to process the forms - so start early!

The process of applying for funding may seem a little daunting at first, but once you get the hang of it, it's very simple. If you're ever in doubt email treasurer@ouds.org who will be able to point you in the right direction, and don't worry if you've missed funding deadlines as many of the funding bodies will accept late submissions if you email them. For more information go to: <http://www.ouds.org/funding.html>, where's there's more detailed information about the process as well as lists of funding bodies.

Resources

The props store

The props store is housed in the Old Observatory in the science park near Keble College. It is open a couple of times a week (Sundays 11-1; Monday 9.30-11.30) for productions to come and borrow props of all shapes and sizes (from large items of furniture to candlesticks) which are then yours for a week in exchange for a small fee.

The costume store

The costume store is run by OUDS and is in Keble Crypt, underneath Keble Chapel. We have a mind-boggling range of different clothes from the medieval period up to modern day, so if you need anything costume-wise, pop in at either 1-2 on Tuesday or 1-2 on Friday. We charge a deposit of £5-£10 when you take them away and then hire charges when you bring them back (dependent on how long they've been gone); the only exception to these rules is Drama Cuppers, where costumes will cost you £1 to take out. We really do have a huge amount of stuff down there, so before you spend all your budget on buying clothes, come and take a look.

The Oxford Drama Assets Committee

The Oxford Drama Assets Committee was set up a few years ago to channel money from OUDS and TAFF into buying useful items for drama at Oxford. The committee is made up out of the UDO, the OUDS and TAFF presidents and treasurers and costume, props store and hires representatives. They meet a few times every term to discuss where the money is needed most and to keep track of past investments. Over the last year they have paid for a new lighting desk for the O'Reilly, a new smoke machine, various storage items for the costume store and are discussing further solutions to the storage problem that comes with the expansion of the costume and props collections.

If you have any investment suggestions for the ODA, please contact Ellie Keel, the UDO under leanor.keel@admin.ox.ac.uk.

Putting together a bid and a budget

Putting together a bid for a venue

Bids can be intimidating documents to put together for shows in Oxford as they are your first chance for a venue to get a feel for your show and why it might be a good thing for them to programme in their seasons. The effort that you put into them makes a big difference and gives people a good idea of the standard of your production and your production team. Before you begin, you must make sure that your creative team have had thorough discussions about their vision for the production so that your bid reflects a cohesive show and that you have a clear picture of how your production will play out. It is a good idea to get this done a few weeks before the bid deadline: it takes a long time to get everyone's statements and biographies together and it's a good idea to give your graphic designer about a week to make the bid look good. Whilst the content is much more important, the aesthetic of your bid again reflects the ambition of your production and goes a long way to establishing you as a serious team, especially if it's your first production.

Format

- Cover
 - Either use your rough poster design or something in line with the aesthetic generally.
 - Important to include is the name of the show and which week or window of weeks you are bidding for (usually specify early or late, but don't expect to get this).
- Statements
 - You should have statements from at least your Producer, Director, Designer and Marketing Manager. These should be between 300 and 500 words, depending on the venue.
 - Statements from the rest of your creative team (Choreographer and Musical Director if relevant, Sound, Lighting, Video, Projection, Costume, Hair) are desirable but are less important than the four above. These are generally shorter and are max 300 words.
 - Be careful not to repeat each other.
- Bios
 - 100 word biographies are needed from everyone you currently have on your team in a uniform format.
- Drawings (Appendix)
 - Include any drawings referenced in your statements. You should sketches of your set design and preferably scale drawings. Sketches of costume and any other important features of your show are also good to include, such as any interesting set pieces or puppets.
- Budget
 - The budget is a crucial part of your bid. See How to Make a Budget section for more information on this. Important to the bid is to include a few sentences on any unusual things in your budget, such as very expensive hires or difficult things to build, like a rain system or

pyrotechnics. You'll be asked about things like this in your interview but it helps to show that you've thought about these things when submitting your bid.

Things to talk about in your statements

- Producer – why this show, why now, why this venue, what's your take, why will it sell, how will you manage the budget, how will you manage the team, what timeframe are you working to, is there a wider impact on student theatre/oxford theatre/ oxford entertainment generally.
- Director – why this show, what's your take, what do you hope to achieve, why is it relevant, plans for casting, plans for rehearsal
- Designer – why this show, what is your aesthetic, how do you hope to achieve this, is it achievable, construction plans
- Marketing Manager – who is your target market(s), how will you target these groups, do you have any unusual campaign ideas related to the show
- Other creative departments - what draws you to this show, what are your design concepts, how does this fit with the overall creative vision

Example Bio

Producer: Emily Lunnon - Emily is a third year at Brasenose reading Philosophy, Politics and Economics. After forming her production company, Curious Grin Productions in 2014, she produced three shows in her second year, *Assassins* (Keble O'Reilly MT14), *King Lear* (Keble O'Reilly HT15) and *Passion* (Keble O'Reilly TT15). This Summer she produced *Around The World In 80 Days* (UK Tour) as part of the OUDS Summer Season, touring in Oxford, Buxton and performing the full month of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Emily is currently producing *Singin' In The Rain* (Oxford Playhouse MT15) and is also the Executive Producer of *RENT* (Oxford Playhouse HT16).

You also don't have to write only about things you've done in Oxford. Any school or extra-curricular activities are good experience.

Putting together a bid for funding

Bids for funding look much the same as bids for venues but you should edit the producer's statement to make it more focused on why the show will sell and why it is worth the funding body investing in it. The marketing manager's statement is also important here and should be similarly focused on how the sell is going to be marketed. Cutting statements from those other than the Producer, Director, Marketing Manager and Designer is usual with these bids as they are shorter, usually no more than eight pages. Bios should still be included to give an idea of the experience of the team and the budget is obviously important.

Building a Budget

Budgets are daunting for new producers and are still tricky several shows in. The most important thing to remember is that the driving force is the creative vision and this is the first thing to be discussed before setting a budget. However, it should also be realistic in terms of breakeven and how much you can sell tickets for.

Step 1: Creative discussion

- Talk to the whole creative team about what each department is creating and what they are creating together. Only after this can you set figures for each department's budget.

Step 2: Put in fixed costs and decide on ticket prices

- These include rights, venue hire costs, and script hire costs.
- Setting ticket prices is tricky but usually the venue has ballpark figures for ticket prices. Musicals tend to be a pound or two more expensive than plays at the same venue due to their larger production costs. The Playhouse has set ticket prices and you can find out what other shows have charged in previous terms in other venues to decide on a figure.
- Student shows tend to sell roughly 70% of their tickets to students so you should include this in your calculation of income.

Step 3: Put in negotiable costs

- Have a look at what your budget comes to with the figures each department has estimated, being aware that you may have to renegotiate.

Step 4: Assess the risk, breakeven and contingency

- Knowing what breakeven figure is sensible for your show is a difficult decision to make and is still hard to think through even after a few shows. As a blanket rule, unless you have a large amount of money in your production company account to blow, your breakeven shouldn't be higher than 70% and this is a very high figure. Musicals usually have higher breakevens due to costing more and shows without rights, such as devised pieces or plays out of copyright, usually have lower breakevens, because no rights are paid. You can always ask producers of shows similar to yours where their breakeven figures were and whether they think yours is realistic.
- You also need to have an idea of how much of your budget you will have funded and what percentage you will take the risk on and how likely you are to gain this amount of funding. If you have a huge budget, expect less funding and more risk taking and if you have a small budget with a low breakeven, expect having to turn down funding so that you make a reasonable profit.
- Set a figure for contingency. Shows typically set this at 5% but if it is a very complex show 10% is probably a safer figure.

Step 5: Managing the Budget

- Throughout the process of the production it is crucial to make sure that all departments are on or under budget and know to keep all of their receipts for you. Sometimes it is possible to reimburse your team along the way if you have enough funding but sometimes you have to wait until the show is over and you have your ticket revenue. You should always be honest with your team about this and prioritise expenditure on large items so that people aren't out of pocket for a long time.
- Keeping accurate accounts is also most easily done along the way so that you don't have a mammoth task at the end of the production.
- Sometimes it is possible to move money around between departments and this is totally fine, just don't overspend unless absolutely necessary.
- Don't use your contingency unless you really need to. This is there for things like set breaking, costumes getting damaged, props needing replacing etc., not for buying extra stuff that you didn't budget for.

Top Tips:

- Always ask for advice if you are unsure – people are always happy to help.
- Be sensible and take advice when offered.
- Keep regular tabs on spending and keep your funders updated with any changes and progress.