

## RED LADDER THEATRE COMPANY

Red Ladder is a radical theatre company with 45 years of history. The company is acknowledged as one of Britain's leading national touring companies producing new theatre, contributing to social change and global justice. Red Ladder is funded by Arts Council England and by Leeds City Council.

Founded in 1968 in London, the company has a colourful history rooted in the radical socialist theatre movement in Britain known as agitprop. Born into an era of riots, demonstrations and revolts, Red Ladder has grown up, kicking and screaming, into the 21st Century, where it continues to fight, to entertain, and to agitate in as equal measures as possible.

Red Ladder exists to create theatre about and around human struggle. To do this, our work must be galvanising and stimulating; generous and life affirming ; collaborative and visionary ; fearless; of and for many people.

We seek to redefine and reclaim notions of popular, political and radical in a theatre context, and place politics and accessibility as twin and complementary facets of a people's theatre. We use our unique history as a leadership resource for theatre and theatre-makers seeking contemporary forms which speak to the politics of the now. "When the best leaders' work is done the people shall say 'We did it ourselves'" Lao Tzu

### **Red Ladder in rehearsal.**

As much as possible Rod Dixon tries to run the rehearsal room as a non-hierarchical space where every voice is heard and where everyone is seen as a collaborator. The work is all text-based developing new plays which are seen as provocations. We do not seek to provide answers but to raise questions – the conversations after our shows are more important than the shows. The shows must be high quality and we seek to work with artists who share an anti-capitalist world view.

A typical project begins with a writer agreeing to work with us – more often we approach a writer we have identified as being a strong contemporary voice. We rarely respond to writers sending us their work – we are too small an organisation to read the hundreds of scripts we get sent –or could be sent if we had an open door to submissions.

Once a writer has agreed to work with us we will have several meetings about the areas of 'struggle' we want to explore and the audience we want to target.

(From 1986 to 2006 Red Ladder targeted young teenagers with all our work and consequently the company was seen less as a political company and more of a theatre company making work for 12 – 16 year olds. Since 2006, Rod Dixon and Chris Lloyd have worked hard to re-position the work for a much wider audience and to return Red Ladder to its more overtly political roots).

A structure for the new play will be agreed and sometimes we ask the writer to provide a scene by scene breakdown.

After this the writer is given a deadline by which they have to have submitted a first draft of the play script. The first draft is discussed and notes are written up which gives the writer some suggestions for how to redraft and whether we feel there is a potential for us to produce the play. ( For example – if the script requires over 10 actors it is very unlikely that we will get the funding to pay for such a

large scale production. Most Red Ladder plays have no more than five actors – sometimes playing several roles.

Once we have what we have agreed is the 'rehearsal draft' of a script – and this can sometimes take up to nine drafts (!) then we cast the play with actors who we feel are suitable for the roles. These castings are either through casting directors, or we run workshop auditions, or they are actors we want to approach because we feel they would be artists we want to work with.

The rehearsals tend to be four weeks long plus a fifth production week when the piece is rehearsed on set and all the technical aspects are added.

In the rehearsal room, time is given in the first week to find a common rehearsal 'language' through exercises, games and working through the text. Time is given to explore character, physicality, voice and we work together to agree and find ways to create the 'world' of the play. This is different for every play and means that no rehearsal is identical although there are some favourite games and exercises. Actors sometimes bring games and exercises that they enjoy or which they have found releases in them the right 'choices' for a role. We like to work physically and use movement to try to find the work through the body rather than in the 'head'. A 'kinesthetic response' is preferred to a psychological analysis of the text. We like to sing together in the mornings – even if the piece is not a piece of theatre with music.

Some scripts are so tight and ready to perform that we ask actors to be 'off book' before we start. More often, the rehearsal script throws up moments which need refining – they are too slow, the action dips in energy, what we thought was comedic isn't funny (!) a moment which is shocking fails to shock ...etc etc. In these cases the writer works with us to discover how to achieve the desired effect. We might improvise an alternative scene or an alternative version of a scene or a part of a scene and then the writer goes away to redraft the moment for us.

Finally we open the show and for the first three or four performances we take careful note of audience responses and make changes or improvements if feedback is useful.

Influences on the work include: Dario Fo; Jacques Le Coq, Mike Alfreds, Teatr Piesn Kozla, Kneehigh, Simon Edwards and Marian Masoliver.