

WEST MIDLANDS ARTSDrama Advisory Panel Meeting No.50POLICY ON ETHNIC DRAMA1. Background

The Drama Advisory Panel considered a policy towards Ethnic Drama in the region in October 1979. A year later the Panel agreed that this initial policy should be reviewed in the light of developments and experience of contact with Ethnic groups and activities.

A special meeting was held on 5 November 1980 to discuss modifications to our initial policy statements.

2. Meeting on 5 November 1980

This meeting was attended by Joyce Cheeseman, Norman Beaton and Ken Bartlett from the Drama Advisory Panel, Christina Orford (Ethnic Arts Officer at the Midlands Arts Centre) and Parminder Vir (Commonwealth Institute). Patric Gilchrist also attended the meeting and Nancy Henderson provided secretarial support.

The meeting discussed activities within the region and how work might best be assisted and supported by West Midlands Arts. In addition, the meeting considered complementary activities that should be introduced into the region through touring schemes and special projects.

Recommendations were made to modify several of the initial policy statements, and there was further detailed discussion of practical problems relating to our support of, and relationships with, these areas of work. It was emphasised that any revised and modified recommendations represented only another stage in discussions and that the issues should not be forgotten or regarded as static.

3. Draft Revised Statement on Ethnic Drama

The Drama Advisory Panel is now asked to consider recommendations from discussions in October 1979, incorporating modifications and additions recommended at the meeting on 5 November 1980. Changes recommended in November are underlined.

(a) Professional Expertise:

Ethnic groups in the region tend to be isolated from the little professional activity and expertise which is available in Britain. Professional expertise could be valuable in the form of workshops or the involvement on a project basis of professional directors and/or writers with ethnic drama groups.



Recommendation 1 : West Midlands Arts should encourage, support and initiate the linking of professional expertise to ethnic drama groups in the region. For the time being, West Midlands Arts should be prepared to take initiatives in organising workshop weekends and other practical courses.

Recommendation 2 : West Midlands Arts should consider awarding at least one bursary each year to a professional theatre worker to stimulate activity and to provide training for ethnic groups in the region.

Recommendation 3 : West Midlands Arts should encourage and support its own clients to employ Black and Asian actors as a normal aspect of a company's operation. It should also try to influence awareness, and a change of attitude, in other theatres and companies within the region.

(b) Touring:

Touring by the few available professional ethnic groups, and by amateur groups from within the region and from other parts of the country, needs to be encouraged and developed. West Midlands Arts has always been ready enough to fund such tours and to help co-ordinate and arrange bookings, but a more initiatory approach is now needed.

Recommendation 4 : West Midlands Arts should take initiatives in identifying companies and productions of quality which might be invited to tour in the region. In particular, there is a need for contemporary art from overseas to be toured in Britain and preferably for such work to be incorporated into existing touring networks. West Midlands Arts should, if necessary, take an initiative in bringing to Britain a company which, through other Regional Arts Associations, could then tour elsewhere.

Recommendation 5 : Ethnic community venues should be developed, in addition to ensuring that work visits more traditional drama venues.

(c) Equipment, Training and Resources:

Ethnic groups often find access to equipment and specialist facilities difficult to arrange. In the long term, a training and resource centre is needed where materials and equipment can be hired (e.g. costumes, lighting, sound equipment) and where workshops can be held for groups throughout the region. Such a resource centre could also provide a base for in-service courses for teachers, youth leaders and community workers. However, more modest short-



term measures can assist with some of these problems.

Recommendation 6 : West Midlands Arts should be ready to respond to requests for help in obtaining small items of equipment for use in ethnic drama where such assistance would represent an effective way of helping the work to develop.

In addition, West Midland Arts should be active in helping to find more sources from which existing equipment could be made available to ethnic groups.

(d) Special Projects:

The non-professional nature of the majority of the activity currently going on in the region means that groups tend to plan in detail project by project. Interesting developments may emerge quite quickly and may need support at an early stage. In addition, groups may feel the need to arrange more contact with each other through workshops, conferences or meetings.

Recommendation 7 : West Midlands Arts should be ready to respond to and encourage initiatives from existing ethnic drama groups and initiatives in setting up new activities.

Recommendation 8 : West Midlands Arts may, for the time being, be the best agency for organising certain workshops and meetings. However, it should also give every encouragement, including financial assistance if necessary, when ethnic organisations themselves wish to arrange such activities. This should be regarded as an essential stage in giving ethnic drama special consideration but this particular form of support would not necessarily continue indefinitely.

(e) Assessment:

Both the criteria for assessment of work and the ways in which assessments are conducted need special consideration.

~~Recommendation 9 :~~ Assessment criteria should include an acknowledgement that a rigid distinction between amateur and professional is not appropriate when considering ethnic drama.

Recommendation 10: West Midlands Arts should identify advisors within the ethnic communities who could provide opinions on applications and who could help monitor activities.

This recommendation should be given much more attention in the light of our growing knowledge of the range and importance of ethnic arts activities within the region.

Recommendation 11: When considering the over-all membership of the Drama Advisory Panel each year, West Midlands Arts should include members with a knowledge of, and/or involvement in, ethnic drama.

(f) Communication:

A desperate need for improved services of information and advice for and about ethnic arts groups has been identified.

Recommendation 12: West Midlands Arts should help to establish and maintain an effective information and advice service for and about ethnic arts groups. An important aspect of this service could be the organisation of conferences, meetings and seminars.