

RACE EQUALITY UNIT'S POLICY ADVISOR'S ASSESSMENT

ON BLACK THEATRE SEASON

1. The Black Theatre Season was initiated by the Race Relations Advisor for Arts in the Ethnic Minority Unit and taken on as a commitment by the REU for its second season. The third season will be presented by the Black Theatre Forum which was set up to stimulate the development of Black Theatre and to act as an effective lobby for Black Theatre companies in London.

The Third Black Theatre Season will again take place in the Arts Theatre, housing three productions for three and half weeks each from January 1986 to March 1986. The companies participating are Tara Arts Group, Temba Theatre Company and the third production will be produced by the Black Theatre Forum and performed by a mixed east of Asian and Afro-Caribbean actors and actresses. This season is of particular importance as not only will there be a mixed cast production but also, the emphasis in this season will be on presenting alternative traditions of theatre to those which inform the theatre arts scene in London generally. Thus, for example, productions of Indian and Afro-Caribbean classics, which will bring before Londoners new forms of theatre. The three proposed plays are:-

- Pirate Princess - A traditional West Indian Pantomime
- The Little Clay Cart - A classical Indian Epic
- Rakshasa's Ring - A mixed cast production on another Indian classic

The Third Black Theatre Season, as proposed, offers several distinct developments upon previous seasons:-

- a) It will be produced by the Black Theatre Forum - an alliance of all the Black and Asian theatre companies in London. For the first time, the Black Theatre Season will benefit from the organised support of all Black theatre companies in London.
- b) Each of the 3 productions will be publicized individually as well as benefit from a 'season-wide' publicity, ie, each of the productions are sought to be marketed as well as the season itself. In a review undertaken by the last 2 season it was identified that while the seasons as a whole were well enough publicized, the individual productions suffered from a lack of Specific publicity.
- c) The theme of this season will seek to offer Londoners more than just the fact of Black performers on stage: viz, the Black traditions of theatre, from India and the Caribbean. For the first time in British Theatre history therefore, classics of the Indian and Caribbean stage will be seen in the West End. This can only enhance the status of Black Theatre in London.

Two successive seasons have been welcomed. Where an interest was expressed for a second season, now there is anticipation for a third season. The momentum and critical interest built up by the second season has to be preserved and encouraged by a third season.

It must be stressed that there is a substantial increase in production costs and this is largely due to the emphasis on the prevalent classical themes of the season, which will require the companies to pay great attention to the number of people in the production and particular attention to costumes and sets and specialist skills

- (choreographers, musicians, etc) - in much the same way as one would expect for productions of Greek or Shakesperian classics.

The GLC's committment to the development of Black Theatre in London, while falling short of providing a permanent theatre, has achieved focus with each successive season - it has witnessed the increase in audiences and in critical attention.

The Third Season in its conception offers every possibility of expanding upon past successes. In the run-up to abolition the Third Black Theatre Season will offer a fitting testimony and indication of GLC's policies.

2. A review of the Second Black Theatre Season highlighted the lack of sufficient publicity on the individual productions. This has now been taken into consideration for the current season.

Due to an extensive publicity campaign proposed for the third Season, officers are confident of a much higher attendance and consequently an increase in Box Office income. The quality of the three productions described further reinforces this view.

3. The main body of the report states that "it is inappropriate for other sources of funding to be sought as this is a GLC own promotion ..." However, a fourth Black Theatre Season is an initiative that GLAA and the ALGB may well consider for 1986/87 in order to sustain the critical interest created by the two previous seasons. It would undermine the GLC initiative and input if other sources of funding were sought. Committee may wish to note that individual companies participating in the third Season are GLAA and ACGB funded.

4. The Committee should also consider the following:-

- a) The Subsidy levels are based on 50% of the capacity. According to information given to officers, attendances could be higher than this figure, with a consequent increase in box office income, and a subsequent reduction in the subsidy level.
- b) The Committee has in the past subsidised theatre of this calibre to a higher level.
- c) The Committee will not disagree with the fact that a large proportion of the audience will be from London's black community. London's black community suffers severe unemployment and low wages. Consequently ticket prices have been kept low.
- d) An increase in ticket prices would result in a reduction in the number of people attending and it has always been this Committee's policy to make art accessible to a wide cross section.
- e) The two previous seasons have initiated a practice of encouraging Black Londoners to visit theatre in London. It has also established in the West End the practice of Black Theatre. It is therefore essential that this evolutionary process of securing a theatre-going audience especially for Black Arts in the West End is maintained and encouraged.

...Cont

- f) The three productions are novel and therefore the Season is far more ambitious:-
 - i. The Little Clay Cart incorporates three art forms, namely dance, music and traditional Indian stage-craft, therefore calling upon specialist skills. It was performed in New York and therefore has an international reputation and has never before been staged in a West End venue.
 - ii. Live musicians will be employed - a point to note - of whom one is visually challenged.
 - iii. The classics precede any Shakespearian text.
- g) The artistic quality of the productions has to match the quality of the classical text.
- h) Numerous indirect benefits from the Seasons:-
 - i. Possibility of additional touring.
 - ii. Establishment of Black Theatre and Black Theatre audiences.
 - iii. Further commissions.

RA/REU/RP/2611