

BEAR HUG

by Robin French

directed by Claudette Bryanston

Educational Workshop Information

Bear Hug is a unique one-day 'stage direction' master-class for drama students aged 14-19 years available from September 2008 across the UK. The play, which is a surreal dark comedy, explores the themes of generational alienation, mental health and drug abuse. The day workshop enables students to direct *Bear Hug* and the performance itself as a catalyst for discussion on the subject of the play.

Bear Hug Synopsis

Paranoid, anxious and alienated -and that's just how the parents feel. What about their son Michael? He's not well and it's going to take more than love and understanding to make him better...

The story is set in an ordinary family house where we see the parents of Michael, an 18 year old bear, welcoming him home from the zoo since he was sent there to be held in captivity. His parents now feel regret for keeping him in the zoo and try as best they can to make him feel at home again in their house. However, things don't quite go that smoothly...

"Blazingly funny, intensely disturbing and audaciously ambitious...a grotesquely farcical spectacle you won't soon forget"

THE TIMES

Bear Hug was first produced by The Royal Court as part of a season of new plays by young playwrights developed by the Royal Court Young Writers Programme. It was given universal acclaim by critics and enjoyed an extended run.

It has played in translation to great success in France, Italy and Germany but Classworks Theatre is delighted to be the first British company since the Royal Court to stage it in England. Playwright Robin French also writes professionally for television and has worked for Talkback and ITV. He is hoping to find time between TV and film writing engagements to attend first rehearsals and occasional after-show discussions.

Robin French admits that in his case the metaphor of the play came from his own experience and things that happened in his family that are so intimate he is even afraid to let his parents see the play in case they are hurt. But for him, the parents are truly heroic. The metaphor is that their son has turned into a bear and we watch how they deal with it, and with the young man trapped in a bear's body; "A play is public property and the audience or critics have a complete right to take the play to be whatever they want. Ionesco told people quite hard what he wanted them to see. I don't want to do that. I want the play

to mean for each member of the audience whatever they happen to glean from it.

Bear Hug is immediate and overtly hilarious in the way it is acted out - and ultimately, disturbing. For me, the play is about mental illness and how a family copes with it; for others it has seemed to be about adolescent rebellion or about drug addiction. The power of the metaphor resides precisely in its elusiveness - and its openness to so many interpretations."

Workshop Synopsis

Workshops will take the form of an intensive day in your school/college working with two professional actors and a highly experienced theatre director. The master-class will give the young people the opportunity to be "directors for the day" and will focus on the analysis and the practical interpretation of the script. It will call upon each class to be positioned as directors and to be able to explore and define the style of presentation and explore its dark surrealism in performance.

The workshop will culminate in a **professional performance** for your school/college community and the wider public in the evening. The central character of The Bear will be represented by a number of student volunteers, performing alongside the professional actors. Each performance will be presented in association with an after-show discussion to allow the themes to be fully explored.

The after-show discussion will cover a range of issues pertinent both to the staging of a theatrical production and to the content of the play. The heart of the after-show debate concerns the rise of mental illness amongst young people as a result of psychotic breakdown triggered by drug abuse and the specific anxiety of the correlation between psychosis type schizophrenia and the growing strength and availability of 'soft' drugs such as cannabis. However, the themes in the play connect to all areas of youth alienation and reach further than the specific issues of drug abuse.

Beneficiaries

The workshop is most appropriate for young people (14-19yrs) studying Drama, Theatre Studies or Performing Arts at either GCSE or Advanced level, or with NVQ students studying either the new 14-19 Diploma, or BTEC courses.

The company will work with teaching groups of between 12-30 young people.

Learning Outcomes

Each student will participate in the following:

- Work with a professional director
- Direct professional actors
- Supervise technical get in/outs
- Act as stage managers and assistant stage managers in a professional context

By the end of the workshop, performance and discussion process, students will have a greater understanding of approaches to directing for the stage and especially understanding and deconstructing a complex social text as well as researching the author, context and subject.

In addition, prior to the workshop day, Classworks Theatre can arrange for the delivery of marketing material and a marketing seminar from an experienced professional from the theatre industry.

About Classworks Theatre

Classworks Theatre was founded in 1983 by the two Artistic Directors, Claudette Bryanston and Jenny Culank. The company toured to Germany, Finland and Poland and visited the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for many years where in 1988 it won the first ever award given by The Independent for Best Production with *The Heart of a Dog*, by Mikhail Bulgakov.

Classworks has since developed into a professional touring theatre company with a focus on new writing for young people, and has toured annually, nationwide for the past 15 years. Together our youth theatre and the touring company have commissioned and produced over 60 productions and consistently provided outstanding opportunities in theatre for and with young people. Classworks is a resident and associate company of The Junction, Cambridge and has developed partnerships with venues such as The Theatre Royal, Plymouth, The New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich and The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry.

We at Classworks recognise theatre as a creative process and as a means of exploration, expression and making meaning. It provides a lens through which we are able to see ourselves and understand how others see us; theatre serves the current curricular, social and cultural contexts in which we work. It is a powerful creative process in which specialised companies such as Classworks Theatre, with recognised expertise of working with young people, can work alongside educators to promote social justice and to equip young people and young adults with the skills they need to go on learning throughout their lives.

Contact Us

If you would like to talk further about *Bear Hug* and enquire about a booking, please contact Elaine Bates, Administrator on 01223 249100 or email info@classworks.org.uk

An opportunity to preview a short extract of the performance and to meet the artistic team to discuss your requirements will be available in June in the Midlands and the Eastern region. Please call or email to add your name to the invitation list or to express your interest.

[Classworks Theatre, The Junction, Clifton Way, Cambridge, CB1 7GX](#)