

## **FYSA Theatre: 'The 56'**

### **'The 56' – Project Description**

“Nobody dies in football matches in fires. It doesn't happen”

At 3.40pm on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1985 a small fire broke out in the main stand at Bradford City's Valley Parade football ground during the final match of the season. Within four minutes the wooden structure was ablaze. Fifty-four Bradford City supporters and two Lincoln City supporters lost their lives.

This unique theatrical experience provides a truthful retelling of stories of those involved in the Bradford City Fire. Adapted solely from real-life testimonies and interview with witnesses this piece of documentary theatre examines the themes of solidarity, strength and community in the face of overwhelming tragedy.



'The 56' – As seen in the Fringe Brochure 2014

'The 56' pays homage to the supporters who lost their lives in one of the darkest days in British footballing history and the acts of bravery of those who survived.

This project would not be possible without the support of the families and witnesses who so generously contributed their time and stories.

All of the profits of the project will go towards the Burns Research Unit and the ground-breaking work they continue to do. So far, FYSA Theatre donated over £500 to the institute.

Recommended age 13+

### **The Mission Statement of 'The 56'**

The mission statement of 'The 56' is to preserve the memories of survivors and witnesses of the Bradford City Stadium Disaster on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1985. We hope to achieve this by introducing a younger generation to this cornerstone in northern history. Born and bred in Yorkshire, the team at FYSA Theatre wanted to take this opportunity to share a story that represents the spirit of the place they grew up.

The piece is written in a verbatim style. The term verbatim refers to the origins of the text spoken in the play. The words of real people are recorded or transcribed by a dramatist during an interview or research process, or are appropriated from existing records such as the transcripts of an official enquiry. They are then arranged into a form of dramatic presentation that preserves the integrity of the testimony.

The reason that we have decided to approach 'The 56' in the verbatim style is because we believe that the testimonies speak for themselves. After conducting several interviews from witnesses of the day, the intention of this piece is to give these people a voice. FYSA has specifically interviewed

survivors across the country to collect a diverse range of narratives and experiences from the 11<sup>th</sup> of May. The text will be formed solely from their testimonies; there will be no embellishments. The role of the actors is to act as a mouthpiece for these people and honestly represent their experiences. Unlike a normal play, our aim is not to dramatize, but recreate.



'The 56' as seen at the Edinburgh Fringe 2014

The main focus of 'The 56' is Bradford spirit. A recurring theme in our research has been how, in times of adversity, the Football Club and the local community came together. We will do this by looking at the aftermath of the fire and how – 29 years later – this community is still thriving.

Representing the stories of the survivors is not an undertaking that we take lightly. Throughout our research, we have always consulted our interviewees and ensured that any information they disclose is treated with integrity.

### Local Schools and 'The 56'

FYSA Theatre is keen to engage pupils from local schools at this landmark moment in both Yorkshire and Bradford's history. The educational element, both from a theatrical and historical point of view, is substantial and we would like to open up a conversation with the foundation about the best way to facilitate this. Since its formation, FYSA Theatre has facilitated workshops for over 1,000 children in the local Sheffield community.

One of the most effective ways that we have engaged various audiences with the events of The Bradford City Fire is the show itself. We would therefore like to extend the opportunity for your institution to run a school trip to see 'The 56' at the Alhambra between Thursday the 23<sup>rd</sup> and Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> of April. <http://www.bradford-theatres.co.uk/whats-on/the-56>. Tickets are priced between £8 and £10 and all proceeds of the show go to Bradford University Burns Research Unit. Due to the educational value of the show, we would be keen to engage as many students as possible with the show. 'The 56' is advertised at a 12+ due to some disturbing content in the show.

FYSA Theatre is primarily focused in providing a series of free theatre workshops for students interested 'The 56'. In this particular case, we have two styles of workshops that we are offering to schools within the local area:

- 1) In the run up to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire, FYSA Theatre aims to sensitively engage pupils with a range of historical talks about the Bradford City Fire. Looking at the themes of community solidarity, individual acts of bravery and the legacy of Bradford University Burns Research Unit. This lecture would last 30-40 minutes. Set in an informal setting, these lectures are designed to broaden pupils understanding of what happened on the day. With the various connections that we have made within the local community, we could also look

into bringing contemporary witnesses and present BCFC fans to discuss their experiences with FYSA Theatre and their unique perspective on the event. An event rarely discussed in Bradford, we also want to answer any questions that pupils may have so that they are well informed for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Please note that all our presentations are written with complete sensitivity and understanding of its audience.

- 2) Working with students that are theatrically minded, our dedicated outreach team will run a series of workshops on the topic of verbatim in order to enhance their skills their skills and understanding in a warm, welcoming and professional environment. Using techniques we have acquired from this field, we will engage creatively and critically with performative theories, styles and texts that look at the lives of everyday people. We will run these workshops at times tailored to best fit into the students' timetables, perhaps in taught program hours for Drama or English, and would last around 75-90 minutes. The workshop will engage with the topic of verbatim as a whole, rather than looking directly at the events surrounding The Bradford City Fire.

Previous feedback from FYSA's workshops:

*Tom did many fun activities with us and got us working with people we wouldn't usually pair ourselves with. As well as increasing my drama skills it also taught me that I can work well with people I don't normally hang around with. – Rita, Year 9*

*'I loved his teaching method. Tom gave me the confidence to get involved.'* – Andrew, Year 11

*'I really enjoyed working with FYSA Theatre; it has made me think about what I might like to do at University and with theatre.'* – Georgie, Year 10

Unlike many theatre companies, FYSA Theatre is looking to establish and create a working relationship with your school for both 'The 56' and future projects. We have deliberately kept some of the options and scope for this project open, with the intention of finding a fit that best suits yourselves and FYSA.

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