

# **The Spirit of Albion**

## A production Diary.

### 06.01.2010

After the success of 2009's show, 'Twisted Tales' and the previous year's 'Alice's Adventures Underground', I really wondered where we should go next with the Young Adults Workshop. Both these shows had been a combination of a devised piece with a literary adaptation and I didn't really want to tread that path again. Then, in a moment of rashness, I suggested we might want to try something involving music. This idea was jumped on with great gusto by the Workshoppers, so, come September 2009 we began the long process of coming up with an original play containing songs. You will notice I am avoiding using the word 'musical' as this conjours up the wrong sort of images to me.

The first hurdle to cross was – what would the show be about and what songs would we use? Now, I had an idea in the back of my mind to use as a fall back suggestion if the group couldn't agree on a theme. This was to look at Belief and Folklore through the songs of Damh the Bard. But when I played a few of his songs to the group there was an immediate connection with them and it was put forward that rather than be a 'fall back' idea, why not run with it? So we did.

Stage 2 was to choose the handful of songs that would make up the core idea of the script so we listened to as many as we could fit in and whittled them down to the 10 we now have in the show. We then dissected these songs to find the message and the story within them and to create characters suggested by them. There followed a series of improvisations that gave us our core structure and fleshed out some of the characters we had come up with. At this point we broke for Christmas.

At the first Workshop in 2010 we were very lucky to be joined for the evening by Damh himself, who spoke to the group telling them of the stories and inspirations behind the songs we had chosen and answering any questions they had. We were also treated to our own 'mini gig' as he played several of the songs live for us. Damh also promised to provide us with backing tracks for the songs, which will be an enormous help.

### 18.02.2010

Several workshops later and things are moving along nicely. We have improv'd almost all of Act One and almost have a complete script for that. Act Two has an outline and we move on to that soon. The aim is to have a finished script by the end of March, giving us three months to rehearse. This may sound like quite a long time but in reality it is only about 10 rehearsals! We will also start working on the songs very soon – and we are now in a position to do this as Damh has delivered us the backing tracks.

### 29.03.10

Last Workshop of March tonight, and we have a 90% finished script. We would have been 100% but were a couple of actors short for some improv sessions so have fallen slightly behind. Hope to read through tonight and play the songs in situ (perhaps even have a bit of a sing-a-long) and see where there are any holes that need plugging. Hopefully we can improv those tonight and I can get the final

First Draft complete for our next session in 2 weeks time, when I fully intend to cast the show. I fully expect to make tweaks to the script as we go along but we are very close now. My biggest concern is that the musical numbers sound and look right. To that end I have asked Felicity Westmacott along to sit in and get some ideas – she is to be our ‘choreographer’ as I thought a set of outside eyes would be useful.

### 08.06.10

Well an awful lot has happened since the last entry. We have a completed script and have been working on the songs. We now very much have the shape of the show in place – it’s now all about the detail. Also, the Studio has a brand new stage and we will be the first show to use it. We have had a couple of setbacks too. Our choreographer has been unable to continue due to other commitments and we have also lost 2 cast members. However, every cloud has a silver lining. I am delighted that ex-workshopper Jo Pickering is now playing a key role in the show on her summer break from Uni and that another old chum, Olee Bass is also taking a role and Shane Lowe is filling in the final piece of the puzzle. As for the choreography, we will be handling that ourselves in the true spirit of the YAW! Laura Martin will be popping along as and when she can to cast an eye over the musical numbers and offer any suggestions as well.

The opening night draws ever closer and the really hard work begins now as we try to hone the production in time. As ever, it will be tight but my faith in the group is as strong as ever.

### Performance week

We had a very good run through on Sunday afternoon but the real fun came in the evening when a select few stayed on and painted the Studio. In less than two hours we transformed the space into a magical woodland grove (with the help of a few bits of tree from James’s Dad’s garden!). Almost more paint ended up on the workshoppers than the walls but the result looks amazing.

Monday during the day Alex and myself rigged and set the lighting plot in time for the tech in the evening. Very smooth and looking good.

Tuesday we had a night off as some of the cast had very important exams on Wed and need to rest/revise.

Wednesday we had the Dress Rehearsal which went very well, if a little reserved. The cast really need an audience now.

Thursday – the first night. WOW! What a night! The audience were amazing.

Damh was in with a fair sized following from the Pagan community. In fact, we had to put extra seats in and still had one standing. We were even turning people away on the door (I hope they come back!). I think it’s fair to say that the response was overwhelming. The cast were on top form and the audience gave them a standing ovation at the end! Many were in tears and Damh called it “one of the high points of my life”. He said he felt so honoured by the show and that the cast were incredible and it gave him faith in the future to see young people so involved and talented. The audience gave the cast another huge ovation when they came out into the bar and if I’m honest, my eyes didn’t stay entirely dry!

So – a year’s work, worth every moment I would say. It’s worth noting that when I say “a year’s work” I am only talking about 24x2 hour workshops. That is to come up with the idea, create the characters, improv the scenes, write the script,

learn the songs and rehearse the play. 24. I am very privileged to work with these young people.

I wonder what we'll do next year?