

Games Time

Stephen Munn and **Lea Anderson** on an outdoor stage show performed by members of the local community, an East Midland response to the Cultural Olympiad

Stephen Munn,
Executive Producer

The vision was to create a large-scale outdoor project, which celebrated London 2012 in the East Midlands, with a focus on diversity and participation holding onto the Olympic values of respect, excellence and friendship.

The initial blue-sky thinking involved a huge box crashing onto the beach at Skegness, spilling out all the toys and games that had ever been created onto the shoreline. Obviously this had to translate into a more practical solution but nevertheless we think the artistic outcome is pretty impressive.

Games Time is one of only four Legacy Trust UK Community Celebration projects: the Land of Giants (Northern Ireland), The Light Tree (South East Region) and The Speed of Light (Scotland). The project is also part of London 2012 Festival.

One of the great rewards of producing is being able to think about the artistic partners you would most like to work with to help deliver your vision. And of course it also gives you the chance to work with old friends again. The fusion of live performance and digital work was key to how Games Time would eventually look and by bringing together the spectacular costumes of Mahogany >



Above and left:
Games Time.
Photos: Kev Ryan



Games Time. Photos: Kev Ryan

(Notting Hill Carnival), the digital animation of Mick McNicholas (BBC Dr Who online games) and the Production / Pyrotechnics of Walk The Plank (Liverpool 08) the aesthetic elements were in place.

Games Time needed a director who had experience of large-scale outdoor community projects and whose practice was rooted in movement. I had no hesitation in approaching Lea Anderson to be the person who could draw together the artistic strands in order to make something outstanding. We also built the capacity of Déda Producing by working with Arts Agenda (Brighton), who took on the role of Creative Producer, allowing me to concentrate on developing the financial partnerships required.

There is a real challenge around getting a group of amazingly talented artistic directors functioning as a team, developing an idea that was not their

own vision originally. The first months were incredibly tough with everyone involved grappling with what the project was about; and of course there was an extremely tight schedule before the first show in July 2011. But once on-site in the high wind and rain, and with 150 local performers to keep engaged (ranging in age from 12 to 80), the talent and professionalism of the team came to the fore with everyone pulling in the same direction; a truly united effort.

Games Time has a large and complicated budget with partners including Arts Council England, six local authorities and six individual arts organisations; a lot of balls to keep in the air and a lot of agendas to meet. After the preview in Skegness partners had concerns over the artistic content and how the work would be developed and it had to be communicated how issues were being addressed in order to keep people

(and their cash) at the table. A leap of faith is always required in these situations.

Personalities have played and continue to play a large part in keeping this massive project on the rails. The task in 2012 does not seem as daunting because we have done it before and although elements have changed there is a confidence within the team which is very reassuring. Déda Producing looks to build on the partnerships and skills that were forged throughout Games Time and use it as a spring-board to create new work for the region and beyond.

A parallel world of online games exists that allows you to sign up and win points for your chosen team. www.gamestimeonline.org.uk has been designed by Cardiff based Airborne Digital Media and again demonstrates the artistic excellence running all the way through the project.

Lea Anderson, Artistic Director

Stephen first started talking to me about Games Time in 2010. At that time Games Time was an enormous, marvellous box of treasures with many exciting and diverse collaborators and multiple ambitions and concepts. It was my job to come up with a focussed practical plan that utilised all the excellent stuff that Stephen had gathered around him in the most coherent way possible, whilst retaining the ambition and the dream. Tricky!

I have had a lot of experience directing very big projects with large groups of community participants. I feel very strongly that art in the community should be just that. First and foremost it is art. There should be no patronising or 'dumbing down'. It is a terrible thing to say that the 'taking part' is all that matters. When an individual decides to commit his or her time and energy to an all-consuming art project, it is my job to ensure that the project embraces the highest artistic values and furthermore is developing the artform. Absolutely no excuse for sloppiness, we need to make an important piece of art as this is an exceptional opportunity and we will not all be together like this again.

I knew that these were values close to Stephen's heart and this is the path we chose for Games Time.

In order to develop and hone the project I created a sketchbook crammed with images of all manner of related visually stimulating items. This is my normal working method. From this, gradually emerged a coherent theme and structure for a performance that utilised the strengths of the collaborators and melded them to form an integrated and unique flavour.

The participants are drawn from the local communities from each performance location. We had to recruit and persuade people who hadn't been invited to do anything like this before.

Each group of participants have varied backgrounds, and many people have never had a go at performing

since school days. I like to think of the participants as forming a 'pavement' of people. By this I mean a cast drawn from multiple age groups and from many areas of society.

This enables individuals to collaborate with people that they don't normally come into contact with in a working situation. For example, a school child and a pensioner don't usually get to discuss the best way to manage a large flag through a narrow gap in the set, or exchange hints on how not to flinch when fireworks explode overhead, as part of a normal working day.

Participants are required to develop the performance in dedicated rehearsals over the months leading up to the show. They can't miss a session.

By Games Time day they will have had to memorise 30 minutes of choreography, wear and manipulate large and spectacular costumes on a huge multi-levelled stage packed full of lights. They will have had to learn to avoid the onstage fireworks that share the action, learn all the music and animation cues, and to manage on top of all this to bring the whole thing to life, a wonderful and magical creation that would not exist without them.

Games Time 2012

Loughborough 9 June 2012,
Northampton 7 July 2012,
Derby 22 September 2012.

visit www.gamestime.org.uk

