

UK PLAYBACK THEATRE GATHERING 2010

Noddfa, Penmaenmawr, North Wales, 28 – 31 October 2010

The wonderful nuns of Noddfa, Brian Tasker and Ecco Playback Theatre Liverpool welcomed 40 participants from around the UK at the end of October to the cosy house set in the Welsh village of Penmaenmawr between the mountains and the sea.

Arrivals started on a starry and crisp Wednesday night and carried on through rain and shine over the next day or so. Two brave souls from Bristol took up the challenge of climbing Snowdon on Thursday morning – which we heard all about in Saturday night's performance! We gathered on Thursday afternoon in the village hall, a 10 minute walk down the hill, using a combination of Biodanza courtesy of Brian and Sociometry from Ecco to warm up to being together. We came from beyond the four corners of the UK, with approximately 13 different companies represented and individuals from as far apart as the Shetland Isles, France, Latvia, Colombia, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand. We got straight into Playback on Thursday evening after a break for a home cooked dinner. As a very new company Ecco were delighted to have the opportunity to hear and share stories from Playback friends of their beginnings in Playback, and also some rather colourful images from travels around the world which often involved bodily functions! We were received very appreciatively and learned a lot from the performance.

After a warm up together in the village hall on Friday morning was the start of a rich and varied palette of workshops over two days. They covered Conducting, Warming up, Playing the Fool, Exploring the relationship between Action therapies and playback, Forms, Creating spaces for listening, Stories around sexual orientation, Addictions, Image and Metaphor, Sculpture, Reviewing Ritual and Teaching Playback. The workshop leaders came from as far north as Argyll & Bute and as far south as Cornwall and represented at least 7 different playback companies and many, many years of experience in Playback and other fields such as Dramatherapy, Theatre, Dance movement Psychotherapy, Sculpture and Organisational Training.

On Friday night another new company, Watch This Space, from Burnley, performed with great enthusiasm and energy – some interesting questions were prompted by the choice they made not to cast a teller's actor in story and the debate continued in and out of workshops for the rest of the weekend.

On Saturday evening we moved to a different community centre slightly further up the road, as the Police had already booked the hall for their Disco. Actually this offered a more inviting space for performance, with a lovely wooden floor and Veronica conducted a company made up of members from Ecco, Watch this Space, Manchester and Spirit Level. Several of the sisters from Noddfa joined us and one shared a story of her return to the house after many years. There was lots of singing on Saturday evening, which had been a bit lacking in the elsewhere in the weekend.

On Sunday morning we gathered together one last time to share our experiences of the past few days and in small groups created presentations to show each other: highs, lows, smiles, tears, communicating and feeling not listened to all got an airing. Then we closed, as we started, to Biodanza rhythms, taking our leave of each other in a ritual before eating another splendid lunch together and making our way home.

Report from Bernadette Hammond of ECCO PT