

Spotlight on the Sector:

Season Two • Episode Two



Andi Stevens

A series of podcast interviews, recorded in response to the COVID-19 lockdown, to capture how the youth theatre sector in Scotland is adapting to the changes brought by the pandemic.

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AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

INTRO: Welcome to the second season of Youth Theatre Arts Scotland's *Spotlight on the Sector*. In this episode, YTAS' Lisa Williamson talks to Andi Stevens from Mull Youth Theatre about the geographical challenges of island life and the positive projects they've been making in lockdown.

LISA: Hi, Andi. First of all, let me say a big thank you for giving us your time today. Looking forward to chatting with you.

ANDI: Hi, Lisa. It's lovely to speak to you from the glorious Isle of Mull today. Quite sunny, a little bit showery, but we'll miss those.

LISA: To get started, it probably makes more sense if you can just tell us a wee bit about yourself and your company, where you work, maybe a little bit of background into the work you were doing before we went into lockdown.

ANDI: We're a small arts venue. Primarily, we're a touring theatre company here at Mull Theatre, funded by Creative Scotland and supported by generating our own income too. We do have an established community performing arts program, weekly classes for the ages 3 to 93. All makes a significant contribution to the cultural life on the island and hopefully throughout Argyll and Bute as well. 2020 was going to be a big year for us and a celebratory 10 years of success for our educational community program.

LISA: How has the company's work adapted over the past few months? Have you developed any new projects or initiatives in this time?

ANDI: We have been running drama sessions online, covering things like juggling - and no breakages! - and also doing things that the kids want to chat about and talk about. Storytelling, they've really enjoyed that and have really enjoyed being together. It keeps that bond that we had in the youth theatre. Zoom does have its pluses. We've actually gained some new members joining our sessions online, who have previously not been able to attend workshops because of living in outlying areas. We are quite geographically-challenged on the island.

As I say, Lisa, 2020 was a really big year for us with festivals to celebrate 10 years and we had lots of events planned. We have adapted them slightly into some of them being online. One of the biggest ones was our 10-year celebration. The children and all the kids have made little films actually and put them up on social media, just saying what theatre means to them, what youth theatre means to them, and what it is giving them. All this will go towards having a quirky 10 + 1 festival in 2021 I think.

LISA: What would you say have been the main challenges in adapting your work during lockdown?

ANDI: The main challenges for me, Lisa, are being technically incompetent. Having an early furlough is a steep learning curve really in computer technology, but I'm coping. Getting there with the help of my students actually. The other thing was to continue our outreach to schools and it's been quite difficult doing dance to the Isle of Tیره, which was a project we had set up with the BFI, but I'm sure we'll be able to cope somehow.

The dance program has been more difficult to deliver online, rather than the drama, but there are ways and means. We're actually going to choreograph with Tidal Dance Company a piece on the beach, on Calgary Beach, on the Isle of Mull this week. It's going to be filmed and then put on social media.

LISA: What has this experience taught you about the role and needs for youth theatre for young people and their local community?

ANDI: We've been taking part in Company Three's Time Capsule, script reading, writing, and intend to actually bury our own time capsule a little theatre on return for future youth theatres to see our life at the moment. Our advantages and our disadvantages? I have been facilitating this as a volunteer, but hopefully, we're thinking about getting back to the theatre as soon as we can.

LISA: Obviously, things are starting to ease a little bit now, so we've got a few more freedoms than we had a month or so ago. What are you looking forward to now? What are you most looking forward to now that we can do a little bit more?

ANDI: There's no doubt, Lisa. The main thing I'm looking forward to is hugging both my daughters. One was stuck in a refugee camp in Bosnia and the other's working for Beacon Arts in Glasgow. I'm a huggy sorta person really and it's going to be really good to meet both of them and do that, and then carry on with the work. I think we'll be all right here on Mull Theatre. A lot of support from the community and a lot of goodwill and motivation with the kids.

OUTRO: Thanks for listening to this episode of *Spotlight on the Sector*. To get the latest episodes or catch up on Season 1, don't forget to subscribe on iTunes or Soundcloud. You can get more information on Youth Theatre Arts Scotland's work and get full transcriptions of every episode on our website at www.ytas.org.uk.