

# fty Years On ...

anks to JOHN  
an the Artistic  
f the Swan  
Worcester,  
/ first play  
on. THE  
X, adapted  
; Andersen,  
the world on  
ankfully it  
off John from  
ning another  
ie following Christmas,  
esult was THE OWL AND  
CAT WENT TO SEE ...



a great reaction, and, following  
idon the following year, ended up  
l by most of the reps. CAMERON  
and I co-produced it on tour, Samuel  
ad it, and its success convinced me that  
re was what I wanted to focus on.  
1, and about seventy-five plays later, it  
to be presented with the JM Barrie  
was particularly special because I  
e this lifetime achievement award back  
brate the centenary of the opening  
PETER PAN. Action for Children's  
t generosity, saw fit to honour my  
ul event at the Prince of Wales  
al colleagues kindly came and said  
cluding Cameron himself – now Sir  
WITH KERR, whose book THE TIGER  
O TEA I adapted and still direct,  
N, whose book CLOCKWORK I  
pera, PETER DUNCAN, who played the  
musical THE GINGERBREAD MAN  
ation of Dahl's FANTASTIC MR FOX,  
PEDLEY, the actor who created the  
FRIENDLY GIANT in my production/

about how far theatre for children has come since I  
started fifty years ago. More product than ever for  
small-scale, middle-scale and even large-scale theatres.  
More theatres and theatre directors making work for  
children an integral part of their programming. More  
practitioners – actors, writers, directors, designers,  
composers – viewing children's theatre as a career  
rather than as a step on the ladder. More acceptance  
within our profession that work for children is  
important, both in terms of entertaining and inspiring  
children today, and in helping create the adult audience  
of the future.

There are still problems, of course. Theatre  
critics and arts editors still don't give enough  
attention or space to the work. Not enough  
training establishments give students information or  
experience in the field. Funding is still a headache  
for most children's theatre companies. The general  
public and schools are too conservative in their  
choice of shows to be seen, so big, commercial titles  
still hold sway.

Most worrying of all is the government's apparent  
determination to sideline arts subjects in schools.  
In primary schools teachers are under pressure to  
improve test results in reading, writing and maths, so  
art, music and drama rarely get a look in. 'Creative  
subjects being squeezed, schools tell BBC' was the  
headline of a recent article by the BBC's Education  
Editor. Things are no better in secondary schools.

Rufus Norris, the director of the National Theatre,

creative GCSEs, with a corresponding drop in the  
number of specialist arts teachers being trained.  
Hardly surprising when the Ebacc, a government  
school performance measure focusing on a core set  
of academic subjects studied for GCSE, does not  
include a single creative discipline. Add the funding  
squeeze into the mix, and the result is that the  
practice and study of drama, design, music and art are  
rapidly disappearing from the curriculum. The pipeline  
of talent into the industry is being cut off by the  
government's misguided sidelining of creativity  
in education.'

Rufus Norris, like many of us, would like to see the  
Ebacc policy reversed. He also points out the irony  
that the private schools have a much more enlightened  
attitude to the arts and their value.

My mission, since the late sixties, has been to enable  
parties of primary school children to come to the  
theatre. We know that many of them would never  
come if it were left to their parents. Teachers are  
indispensable in being able to offer all children a 'suck  
it and see' experience of live theatre. Yet the primary  
school party market is dwindling, partly because of the  
cost (not just the ticket, but also the coach) and partly  
because teachers feel the time would be better spent  
preparing for the wretched tests.

Another irony is that there is a growing market for  
theatre for under-fives, but the majority of the young  
children coming to see shows like my adaptation of

THE TIGER WHO CAME TO TEA, are from the  
more privileged middle class, whose parents believe in  
the benefits of such an experience.

We are at risk of theatre for children and young  
people becoming, along with other opportunities to  
experience and take part in creative activities, unfairly  
elitist. We cannot, we must not, allow the positive  
developments in the sector we have witnessed over  
the last fifty years to be cancelled out by a blinkered  
and philistine education system.

David Wood  
20.02.2018



## BAND DIARY

THIS MONTH'S  
PROVINCIAL  
ONE-NIGHTERS

**MICHAEL LAW'S  
PICCADILLY  
DANCE  
ORCHESTRA  
JUNE**

- 4 Hopton-on-Sea, Potters
- 6 Thoresby,  
Thoresby Hall Hotel
- 14 Milton Keynes,  
The Stables
- 30 Pershore, Number 8

**NICK ROSS  
ORCHESTRA  
JULY**

- 14 Dunstable,  
Grove Theatre

**SYD LAWRENCE  
ORCHESTRA  
JUNE**

- 8-10 Hopton-on-Sea, Potters

**NYJO  
JUNE**

- 3 Newbury,  
Highclere Castle
- 10 Clapham,  
Omnibus Theatre

**JULY**

- 11 Henley,  
Henley Festival  
(Quartet)
- 11 Lichfield,  
Lichfield Cathedral
- 14 Winchester,  
St. Paul's Church
- 20 Barnsley,  
Lamproom Theatre
- 21 Buxton,  
International Festival

