



Alumnus James Pidgeon
Subject English and Drama
Graduated 2009
Place of Work National Theatre
Position Watch This Space Festival and Platforms Assistant



After working in Southwark Community Projects at Shakespeare's Globe throughout his degree and then completing a year as President of the Students' Union, James worked as Assistant to the Directors' Office at Battersea Arts Centre before moving onto the National Theatre where he now works as the Watch This Space Festival and Platforms Assistant. The Watch This Space Festival is the National's free summer Festival of outdoor entertainment showcasing some of the best work in the outdoor arts sector from across the world.

Great minds go on to great places

How did you find studying a joint degree?

I chose English and Drama at Royal Holloway because of the integration of both disciplines into one course rather than treating English and Drama as two separate entities. I was attracted to how specific bespoke modules on the course purposefully combined the two subjects, as well as being taught by representatives from both departments. The two disciplines were treated as complementary subjects rather than completely detached subjects, the latter of which I'd seen at other universities. I was also drawn to the fact that all of the staff in both departments are practicing researchers, professionals and pioneers in their field. I really enjoyed my time in both departments.

What types of activities were you involved with at Royal Holloway?

Sometimes I involved myself in so much extra-curricular activity that I forgot I also had a degree to study for! The student experience nowadays is so much more than merely obtaining a degree. As well as being President of the Drama Society I was particularly involved in the Students' Union and stayed on for an extra year after graduating to act as the SU President. My proudest achievement as SU President would probably be the relationships

we forged with the College and the legacy we left for future SU executives. We spent a lot of time strategising and setting a foundation for the future of the SU so it could be used as a launch pad to then create change quicker. We prepared the SU for registered charity status and also started the ball rolling for the refurbishment of the main Students' Union building that has now been completed. The Students' Union not only offers Royal Holloway students a fantastic social scene, but also gives so many opportunities to get involved in campaign work, clubs and societies, welfare and support, the magazine and radio station, elections, student representation, volunteering and entrepreneurial activity. Furthermore, the SU employs about 200 members of student staff which is wonderful for those who need to earn some money during their time at university.

What is your fondest memory of Royal Holloway?

Directing Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* was a particular highlight, as well as coordinating the campus-wide Shakespeare Festival in 2009. In fact, any production I was part of – whether as part of my course, or extra-curricular – was a fantastic experience. There are so many opportunities to

get involved in performance-based activities and whilst these moments were great in strengthening my practical, social and transferable skills, I also always valued how they directly or indirectly complemented my academic study.

What did you learn at Royal Holloway that helped you develop your career?

Not only did Royal Holloway offer me a huge breadth of academic knowledge, it also taught me the importance of being organised, working efficiently in a team, being tactful and always communicating effectively in order to succeed. Students are consistently and often subconsciously learning these skills during every day of their university careers, and it is these elements combined with a concrete knowledge of my subject area that have really helped my career to develop.

What do you do now?

I am the Watch This Space Festival and Platforms Assistant for the National Theatre. The Watch This Space Festival – a free summer Festival of outdoor entertainment demonstrating the National's commitment to the sometimes underrated outdoor arts sector – is the main initiative I work on at the National. My role involves contracting artists,





people with passion

“Not only did Royal Holloway offer me a huge breadth of academic knowledge, it also taught me the importance of being organised, working efficiently in a team, being tactful and always communicating effectively in order to succeed.”



liaising with companies about their technical and production requirements, acting as the first point of contact for internal and external Festival enquiries, assisting the Producer with programming the Festival, welcoming and looking after all Festival artists, day-to-day management of the budget, managing Festival stewards, coordinating all FEU and Certificate of Sponsorship applications, and seeing a lot of theatre throughout the year. One particularly interesting company we've worked with is the Gandini Juggling company who are based in London. They are absolutely incredible and, as well as having performed at the National a number of times, they also regularly tour across the world and have recently performed at the Royal Opera House as part of the London International Mime Festival. They are innovators in theatre and circus arts and are a prime example of challenging the stereotypical assumptions of juggling and outdoor theatre.

I also work on the Platforms programme, which is a constantly running programme of main house talks, debates and pre-show discussions that complements the National's repertoire and educates and entertains our audiences. We could

have a director talking about their show at the National or an actor having a conversation about their role in the repertoire; all Platforms provide audiences with a form of theatrical debate and discussion beyond the actual shows.

What exciting projects have you been working on?

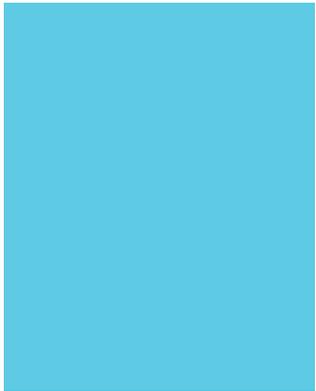
We're now currently programming a bumper 2012 Festival coinciding with the city's Queen's Jubilee and Olympic Games celebrations, having completed last year's Watch This Space Festival which opened on the 30th June 2011 and ran for 12 weeks. 81 different companies performed across the 12 weeks (56 UK-based and 25 international) with a total of 902 visiting performers and technicians. We had small-scale street performances from the UK, Canada and Spain through to huge shows from Poland, Australia and France, often performing to up to 1,600 people on the South Bank. Shows took place 7-days a week with a total of 228 productions throughout the Festival – it was both exhilarating and exhausting!

What are your aspirations?

My long-term aspirations are to become an Executive Producer or Director of a subsidised theatre or arts centre; I'm conscious of the career route which I need to take in order to achieve this and I've always got my eyes open for opportunities at my favourite London spaces such as the Lyric Hammersmith, Donmar Warehouse and Royal Court.

What advice would you give to current students?

My main piece of advice to any student would be to utilise every opportunity presented to them whilst at university, but to never lose sight of post-university plans. 3 or 4 years may seem like a long time for a degree, but it is often over sooner than you know it: always complement your academic study with gaining experience outside of university through work placements, internships and so on, as you'll then be the student who stands out from that increasingly large pool of graduate job applicants.



For more Alumni Profiles visit: www.rhul.ac.uk/alumni/profiles/