



Louise Jeffreys,  
the head of theatre, Barbican Centre

## Presenter Interview プレゼンターインタビュー

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Three years since the Royal Shakespeare Company, moved to new premises, the Barbican Centre adopts new strategies

ロイヤル・シェイクスピア・カンパニーが移転して3年  
バービカン・シアターの新戦略

The Barbican Centre promoting its year-round BITE (Barbican International Theatre Events) program of international theater performances, as well as actively pursuing collaborative productions with overseas companies. In this month's interview the Barbican Centre's head of theatre, Louise Jeffreys, speaks about these new programs.

(Interviewed with ShinKo Suga)

### Data



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<http://www.barbican.org.uk/>

Can you tell us about the historical background of the Barbican?

The Barbican Centre is lying at the heart of the 140,000 square metre residential estate known as the Barbican. A maze of small streets and warehouses before World War II, the area was bombed in December 1940 and completely devastated. In 1955, the first proposal for the area's development was submitted, and central to the scheme was a large multi-arts centre. The Barbican Centre lies in the City of London (the City for short), which started in the first century and is one of the oldest areas in Britain. It is a special autonomous area with its own mayor and police. The independent local authority in the City is called the Corporation of London. The Barbican was built as 'the City's gift to the Nation' by the Corporation of London at an historical capital cost of 161 million pounds, equivalent to between 400-500 million pounds today. After the Art Council of England and the BBC, the Corporation of London is the third biggest sponsor for the arts in Britain.

Would you tell us about BITE seasons?

Since 1998, the Barbican has become one of the most important promoters of international theatre in Britain through its BITE programme. BITE stands for Barbican International Theatre Events, and initially occupied six months of the year, the season became a continuous year-round programme in summer 2002. The Centre is now the principal presenter of international theatre in the UK, co-commissioning and co-producing theatre, dance and music theatre with international partners as well as presenting the most diverse range of work in Britain. Laurie Anderson, Pina Bausch, Complicite, Merce Cunningham, Philip Glass, Heiner Goebbels, Yukio Ninagawa, Steve Reich, Twyla Tharp, Tom Waits and Robert Wilson are amongst the artists whose work the Barbican has presented in recent years.

Can you tell us about the latest BITE programme?

With regard to the new programme from January to June 2005, there is a modern play by the Abbey theatre from Ireland, a play that portrays the love between Anton Chekhov and Olga Knipper, *Ta Main Dans La Mienne*, directed by Peter Brook has been already shown. In April, the very talented woman director, Deborah Warner will present *Julius Caesar*. In May, *The End of the Moon* by Laurie Anderson, an American performance artist, and *Uncle Vanya* by Maly Drama Theatre of St Petersburg, Russia, will be shown. In June, Merce Cunningham Dance Company from America will be performing *Event*. A total of twelve theatre companies will be working here.

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Barbican used to be the London home of the Royal Shakespeare Company. What made them leave the Barbican?

The Barbican theatre was originally built as the London home of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) but their policy has changed and they decided to present themselves firmly in the West End and different places. In 1996, they told us they were moving out for six months of the year and that gave us an opportunity to run BITE for six months. Major refurbishment of theatre facilities to enable visits by the broadest range of international theatre companies took place. And then, in May 2002, the RSC finally left the Barbican.

(At present, the RSC is showing Shakespeare's plays at the Albury theatre and performing classical Spanish plays at the Playhouse theatre in the West End, which is the centre of show business in London).

Who owns the Barbican Centre?

The Barbican is owned, funded and managed by the Corporation of London, the local authority for the City of London. The Corporation of London's annual revenue grant for the Barbican was approximately 20,530,000 pounds in 2003/2004. From this, the Barbican theatre has an annual programming investment budget slightly less than 2 million pounds for BITE. My responsibility as the head of theatre is programming the two theatre spaces we have.

How long have you been working at the Barbican? Can you tell us your background in theatre work?

I joined the Barbican in January 1999. I did a degree in Manchester University studying drama and I started off as a stage manager in repertory theatre. Then, I was a technical director at English National Opera, and I worked as production coordinator at Bayerische Staatsoper, an opera house in Munich. Prior to the Barbican, I was an administrative director of a regional theatre in Britain called Nottingham Play House. I have experience both for opera and theatre, and I also have technical, administrative and creative background.

Have you ever been to Japan?

I have been to Japan once, very briefly, to see one of Ninagawa's productions "Modern Noh Play" at Sainokuni Saitama art theatre in 2001. I have not been to Japan to see a lot of work, but that probably what I should do.

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*The Elephant Vanishes*  
Photo by Joan Marcus

### How do you choose theatre companies for BITE?

It's a really big mixture. First, we choose internationally renowned directors like Ninagawa, Peter Brook etc. We also like contemporary work that challenges people and forms of theatre, which have not been seen before. We also present contemporary dance and music theatre, which has large music components for it but staged. The most important thing is to have work of the highest quality, certainly this is nothing to quota of countries. We will choose the best work that we can find from three to four different countries, and then we might look at contrast or balance between dance and theatre and great people and newer people and, to a lesser extent, balance of countries. We would not do the whole season with work from one country but at the same time we do not say no to more than one work for a season if they were particularly interesting.

### Where do you get information about outstanding theatre companies?

It's a mixture of seeing and hearing. I travel a lot internationally to see work. What I decide to see depends on recommendations from the industry, or going to see other international festivals to see work there. A lot of people write and suggest to us. Quite often the cultural department of a particular country come to see us. We get quite a lot of invitations from countries with the view to bring the work to here, and often like Ninagawa, we present the company that was successful and we want to repeat that.

### Who are the audience of BITE?

Audience changes every time. In a sense we are different from a festival. In a festival you may have different people coming to the place as well as the local people, seeing lots in a short space of time. Because BITE is extended over the whole year, we feel our audiences are predominantly London based people and not so much a tourist audience, as people are specifically coming to see our work. But, if we have Japanese theatre, a large section of the audience is Japanese.

### What Japanese theatre has been shown at the Barbican? In general, which programme was popular?

We have shown Ninagawa's "Modern Noh Play", "Shin Doku Maru", "Hamlet" and Dam Type Theatre. Another Japanese piece we have done is "The Elephant Vanishes" which is a collaboration between Complicite and Setagaya. We did "Hashirigaki" which is from Theatre Vidy, Lausanne in Switzerland, which had a Japanese actress in it, and Japanese folk music was part of it as well. "The Elephant Vanishes" we presented twice as it was such a huge success. I think it had a magic combination really. Firstly, it was a great piece of work. Secondly, Complicite and Simon McBurney are so well known here.

Thirdly, Murakami has a cult following and is certainly immensely respected in Britain. All of these combine in a fantastic production. With regard to Ninagawa's productions, I think people do enjoy the insight into Japanese life.

The ticket for Peter Brook's work has been hugely absolutely sold out and is an incredible success, Abbey Theatre or dance from Africa has been very successful, Robert Wilson from America has been incredibly successful. And even little quirky unusual things like Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain have been very successful as well.

### Since BITE has started, are there any changes in direction?

We made a slight change of direction when the RSC left full time and BITE took

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over a year. It was just impossible to double our six-month season because that will be stretching the audience too much and we did not really have money to do that. We wanted to present some of the productions for longer and for the first time we started to produce our own show. Last year "Black Rider" by Robert Wilson, first presented at the Barbican for five weeks, travelled to San Francisco and Sidney. "Julius Caesar" by Deborah Warner will be travelling to Paris, Madrid and Luxemburg. Judging over the last six months we have done with box office, we found in most of our shows we exceeded our expectations in terms of audiences and we always met our budget. So, I suppose we are doing very well.

### What is the merit of touring abroad?

You cannot make a profit even if the theatre travels abroad, but what it does is help to find co-producing partners who is willing to put money into production and make production possible. The two we have done are very expensive projects, we would not be able to do that without co-production partners.

### Are you planning more international collaboration?

There are possibilities that Complicite and Setagaya collaborate again and we already said we would like to be part of that.

### Have you any plans to show any Japanese theatre in future?

We do not have anything specific in the pipeline but that might change tomorrow or next day. Of course we are talking to Theoma Holt about the next time when we bring Ninagawa back but we do not have a fixed date yet.